

THE
C A S E
O F
R E A S O N,
OR
NATURAL RELIGION,

Fairly and Fully Stated.

In ANSWER to a Book, intitled,

Christianity as old as the Creation.

The S E C O N D E D I T I O N,
Revised and Corrected.

By *WILLIAM LAW, M. A.*

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The C O N T E N T S.

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THE



THE
INTRODUCTION,
Shewing the
STATE of the Controversy.



HE Infidelity which is now openly declared for, pretends to support itself upon the *sufficiency*, *excellency*, and *absolute perfection* of Reason, or Natural Religion.

The author with whom I am here engaged, makes no attempt to disprove or invalidate that *historical evidence* on which Christianity is founded; but by arguments drawn from the nature of God, and natural Religion, pretends to prove, that no Religion can come from God, which teaches any thing more than that, which is fully manifest to all mankind by the *mere light of nature*.

His chief principles may be reduced to these following propositions.

1. That human reason, or natural light, is the *only means* of knowing all that God requires of us.

2. That

2. That reason, or natural light, is so full, sufficient, plain, and certain a rule or guide in all religious duties, that no external divine revelation can add any thing to it, or require us to believe or practise any thing, that was not as fully known before. A revelation, if ever made, can only differ from natural religion, in the manner of its being communicated. It can only declare those very *same* things *externally*, which were before equally declared by the *internal* light of nature.

3. That this must be the case of natural and revealed religion, unless God be an arbitrary Being. For if God be not an arbitrary Being, but acts according to the reason and nature of things; then he can require nothing of us by revelation, but what is already required by the nature and reason of things. And therefore, as he expresses it, *reason and revelation must exactly answer one another like two tallies**.

4. That whatever is at any time admitted as matter of religion, that is not manifest from the reason of the thing, and plainly required by the light of nature, is gross superstition.

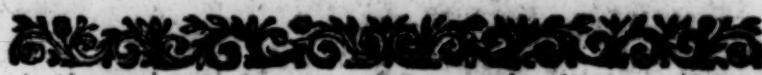
5. That

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5. That it is inconsistent with the divine perfections, to suppose, that God can by an external revelation give any religious light or knowledge, at *any time*, to *any people*, which was not equally given at *all times*, and to *all people*.

This is the state of the controversy. As to the railing accusations, and scurrilous language, which this author pours out, at all adventures, upon the Christian Clergy, I shall wholly pass them over; my intention being only to appeal to the reason of the Reader, and to add nothing to it, but the safe, unerring light of divine Revelation.




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All the above by the Reverend Mr L A W.



C H A P. I.

*Enquiring, whether there be any thing
in the nature and condition of man,
to oblige him to think, that he is
not to admit of any doctrines or in-
stitutions, as revealed from God,
but such as his own Reason can prove
to be necessary from the nature of
things.*



BEGIN with enquiring what there is to oblige a man to hold this opinion, because if there is not some strong and plain proof arising from the *nature* and *condition* of man, to oblige him thus to abide by the sole light of his own Reason; it may be so far from being a duty, which he owes to God, that it may be reckoned amongst his most criminal presumptions. And the pleading for this authority of his own Reason, may have the guilt of pleading for his greatest vanity. And if, as this Writer observes, *spiritual pride be the worst sort of pride*,* a confident reliance upon our own Re-

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son,

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son, as having a right to determine all matters between God and man, if it should prove to be a *groundless pretension*, bids fair to be reckoned the highest instance of the *worst* kind of the worst of sins.

Every other instance of vanity, every degree of personal pride, and self-esteem, may be a pardonable weakness in comparison of this. For how small is that pride which only makes us prefer our own personal beauty or merit to that of our fellow creatures, when compared with a self-confiding Reason, which is too haughty to adore any thing in the divine counsels, which it cannot fully comprehend; or to submit to any directions from God, but such as its own wisdom could prescribe? Thus much is certain, that there can be no *medium* in this matter. The claiming this authority to our own Reason, must either be a very great duty, or amongst the greatest of sins.

If it be a *sin* to admit of any *secrets* in divine providence, if it be a *crime* to ascribe wisdom and goodness to God in things we cannot comprehend. If it be a *baseness* and *meanness* of spirit to believe that God can teach us *better*, or *more* than we can teach ourselves. If it be a *shameful apostasy* from the dignity of our nature, to be humble in the hands of God, to submit to any *mysterious providence* over us, to comply with any other methods of *homage* and *adoration* of him, than such as we could of ourselves contrive and justify; then it is certainly

a great duty to assert and maintain this authority of our own Reason.

On the other hand ; If the profoundest humility towards *God*, be the highest instance of piety. If every thing within us and without us, if every thing we know of *God*, every thing we know of ourselves preaches up humility to us, as the foundation of every virtue, as the life and soul of all holiness. If *sin* had its beginning from *pride*, and *hell* be the effect of it, if *devils* are what they are through spiritual pride and self-conceit, then we have great reason to believe, that the claiming this authority to our Reason, in opposition to the revealed wisdom of *God*, is not a frailty of *flesh* and *blood*, but that same spiritual pride which turned *Angels* into *apostate Spirits*.

Since therefore this appealing to our own Reason, as the absolutely *perfect measure and rule* of all that ought to pass between *God* and *man*, has an *appearance* of a pride of the *worst kind*, and such as unites us both in temper and conduct with the fallen spirits of the kingdom of darkness, it highly concerns every pleader on that side, to consider what grounds he proceeds upon, and to ask himself, what there is in the *state* and *condition* of human nature, to oblige him to think that nothing can be *divine* or *holy*, or *necessary*, in religion, but what *human Reason* dictates ?

I hope the reader will think this a fair state of the case, and that all the light we can have in this Matter, must arise from a thorough

consideration of the *state* and *condition* of man in this world. If without revelation he is free from mysteries as a *moral* and *religious* agent, then he has some plea from his *state* and *condition* to reject *revealed* mysteries.

But if in a state of natural religion, and mere morality, he can't acknowledge a divine providence, or worship and adore God, without *as much* implicit faith, and humble submission of his Reason, as any revealed mysteries require; then his *state* and *condition* in the world, condemns his refusal of any revelation sufficiently attested to come from God. This enquiry therefore into the state and condition of man, being so plainly the true point of the controversy, I hope to obtain the reader's impartial attention to it.

Had mankind continued in a state of *perfect innocence*, without ever failing in their duty either to God or man, yet even in such a state, they could never have known what God would or would not reveal to them, but by some express revelation from him. And as God might intend to raise them to some higher, and unknown state of perfection; so he might raise them to it by the revelation of such things as their own Reason, though innocent and uncorrupt, yet could not have discovered.

But if man, in a state of *innocence*, could have no pretence to set himself against divine revelation, and make his own Reason the *final judge* of what God could, or could not reveal to him; much less has he any pretence for

for so doing in his present state of *sin, ignorance, and misery*. His *nature* and *condition* is so far from furnishing him with reasons against revelation, against any *supernatural* help from God; that it seems to be inconsolable without it; and every circumstance of his life prepares him to hope for terms of *mercy* and deliverance from his present guilt and misery, not according to *schemes* of his *own contrivance*, not from his *own Knowledge* of the *nature, and reason, and fitness* of things, but from some *incomprehensible depth* of divine goodness.

For if sin, and misery, and ignorance, cannot convince us of our own weakness, cannot prepare us to accept of any *methods* of *atoning* for our guilt, but such as our own guilty disordered Reason can suggest, we are not far from the hardened state of those miserable spirits that make war against God.

For to insist upon the *prerogative* of our own nature, as qualifying us to make our own peace with God, and to reject the *atonement* which he has provided for us, because we esteem it more fit and reasonable, that our *own repentance* should be sufficient without it, is the same height of *pride* and *impiety*, as to affirm, that we have no need of any repentance at all.

For as mankind, if they had continued in a state of *Innocence*, could not have known how their innocence was to be rewarded, or what changes of state God intended them for, but as revelation had discovered these things unto them; So after they were *fallen* into a state of

guilt and sin, they could never know what effects it was to have upon them, what misery it would expose them to, or when, or how, or whether they were ever to be delivered from it, and made as happy as if they had never sinned ; these are things that nothing but a revelation from God could teach them.

So that for a Sinner to pretend to appoint the atonement for his own Sins, or to think himself able to tell what it ought to be, or what effect it must have with God, is as foolish and vain a presumption, as if man in innocence should have pretended to appoint his own method of being changed into a *Cherubim*.

The Writers against Revelation appeal to the Reason and Nature of things, as infallibly discovering every thing that a Revelation from God can teach us.

Thus our Author ; *If the relations between things, and the fitness resulting from thence, be not the sole Rule of God's actions, must not God be an arbitrary Being ? But if God only commands what the nature of things shew to be fit, it is scarce possible that men should mistake their duty ; since a mind that is attentive can as easily distinguish fit from unfit, as the Eye can beauty from deformity **.

It is granted, that there is a fitness and unfitness of actions founded in the nature of things, and resulting from the relations that persons and things bear to one another. It is also granted, that the reasonableness of most of the

* Page 30.

duties of children to their parents, of parents to their children, and of men to men, is very apparent, from the relations they bear to one another; and that several of the duties which we owe to God, plainly appear to us, as soon as we acknowledge the relation that is between God and us.

But then, all this granted, this *whole argument* proves directly the contrary to that which this author intended to prove by it.

I here therefore join with this Author: I readily grant, that the Nature, Reason and Relations of things and persons, and the fitness of actions resulting from thence, is the *sole rule* of God's actions. And I appeal to this one common and confessed principle, as a sufficient proof that a man cannot thus abide by the *sole Light* of his own Reason, without contradicting the nature and reason of things, and denying this to be the *sole Rule* of God's actions.

For if the *fitness* of actions is founded in the *nature* of things and persons, and this fitness be the *sole Rule* of God's actions, it is certain that the Rule by which he acts, must in many instances be *entirely inconceiveable* by us, so as not to be known *at all*, and in no instances *fully known*, or *perfectly comprehended*.

For if God is to act according to a *fitness founded* in the *nature* of things, and nothing can be fit for him to do, but what has its fitness founded in his own *divinely perfect* and *incomprehensible* nature, must he not necessarily act by a Rule *above* all human comprehension?

This argument supposes that he cannot do what is fit for him to do, unless what he does has its fitness founded in his own *Nature*; but if he must govern his actions by his own nature, he must act by a *Rule* that is just as incomprehensible to us as his own nature.

And we can be no farther competent judges of the fitness of the conduct of God, than we are competent judges of the divine nature; and can no more tell what is, or is not infinitely wise in God, than we can raise ourselves to a state of infinite wisdom.

So that if the fitness of actions is founded in the particular nature of things and persons, and the fitness of God's actions must arise from that which is particular to his nature, then we have from this argument, the utmost certainty that the *Rule* or *Reasons* of God's actions must in many cases be entirely inconceiveable by us, and in no cases perfectly and fully apprehended; and for this very reason, because he is not an arbitrary being, that acts by mere will, but is governed in every thing he does, by the reason and nature of things. For if he is not arbitrary, but acts according to the nature of things, then he must act according to his own nature. But if his own nature must be the reason, rule and measure of his actions; if they are only fit and reasonable because they are according to this *Rule and Reason*, then it necessarily follows, that the fitness of many of God's actions must be incomprehensible to us, merely for this reason, because they have their

their *proper fitness*; such a fitness as is founded in the divine nature.

How mistaken therefore is this author, when he argues after this manner. *If God requires things of us, whose fitness our Reason can't prove from the nature of things, must he not be an arbitrary being?* For how can that prove God to be an arbitrary agent, which is the necessary consequence of his not being arbitrary?

For supposing God to be an arbitrary Being, there would then be a bare possibility of our comprehending the fitness of every thing he required of us. For as he might act by *mere will*, so he might chuse to act according to our nature, and suitable to our comprehensions, and not according to his own nature, and infinite perfections.

But supposing God not to be an *arbitrary Being*, but to act constantly, as the perfections of his own nature make it *fit* and *reasonable* for him to act, then there is an utter impossibility of our comprehending the reasonableness and fitness of many of his actions.

For instance; look at the *reason* of things, and the *fitness* of actions, and tell me how they moved God to create mankind in the state and condition they are in. Nothing is more above the reason of men, than to explain the reasonableness and infinite wisdom of God's providence in creating man of such a *form* and *condition*, to go through *such* a state of things as human life has shewn itself to be. No revealed mysteries can more exceed the Comprehension of man, than the state of human life itself.

Shew

Shew me according to what *fitness*, founded in the *nature* of things, God's infinite wisdom was determined to form you in such a manner, bring you into such a world, and suffer and preserve *such a state* of things, as human life is, and then you may have some pretence to believe no revealed doctrines, but such as your own reason can deduce from the nature of things and the fitness of actions.

But whilst your own *form*, whilst *Creation* and *Providence* are depths which you cannot thus look into, 'tis strangely absurd to pretend, that God cannot reveal any thing to you as a matter of religion, except your own reason can shew its foundation in the nature and reason of things.

For does not your own *make*, and *constitution*, the reasonableness of God's providence, and the *fitness* of the State of human life, as much concern you, as any *revealed* doctrines? Is it not as *unfit* for God to create man in such a *state*, subject to such a *course* of providence, as he can't *prove* to be founded in the *fitness* and *reasonableness* of things; as to reveal to him such truths, or methods of salvation, as he cannot by any arguments of his own prove to be necessary?

Revelation, you say, is on your account, and therefore you ought to see the *reasonableness* and *fitness* of it. And don't you also say, that God has made you for your *own sake*, ought you not therefore to know the *reasonableness* and *fitness* of God's forming you as you are? Don't you say, that *providence* is for the *sake* of Man?

is it not therefore fit and reasonable, in the nature of things, that there should be no *mysteries*, or *secrets*, in providence, but that man should so see its methods, as to be able to prove all its steps to be constantly fit and reasonable?

Don't you say, that the *world* is for the *fake* of man; is it not therefore fit and reasonable that man should see, that the *past* and *present* state of the world has been such as the reason and fitness of things required it should be?

Now if the *imperfect* state of human nature, the *miseries* and *calamities* of this life, the *diseases* and mortality of human bodies, the *methods* of God's continual providence in governing human affairs, are things that as much concern us, and as nearly relate to us, as any methods of revealed religion; and if these are things that we cannot examine or explain, according to any *fitness* or *unfitness* founded in the *nature* of things, but must believe a great deal more of the infinite wisdom of God, than we can so explain; have we any reason to think, that God cannot, or ought not to raise us out of this unhappy state of things, help us to an higher order of life, and exalt us to a nearer enjoyment of himself, by any means, but such as our own poor Reason can grope out of the nature and fitness of things?

Now what is the reason, that all is thus mysterious and unmeasurable by human Reason, in these matters so nearly concerning human nature? 'Tis because God is not an *arbitrary Being*, but does that which the *incomprehensible*

sible perfections of his own nature, make it fit and reasonable for him to do. Do but grant that nothing can be fit for God to do, but what is according to his own infinite perfections: Let but this be the rule of his actions, and then you have the fullest proof, that the fitness of his actions must be above our comprehension, who can only judge of a fitness according to our own perfections; and then we must be surrounded with mystery for this very reason, because God acts according to a certain rule, his own Nature.

Again: What is the nature of a human soul, upon what terms, and in what manner it is united to the body, how far it is different from it, how far it is subject to it, what powers and faculties it derives from it; are things wherein the wisdom and goodness of God, and the happiness of man are deeply concerned. Is it not necessary that these things should have their foundation in the reason, and fitness of things, and yet what natural Reason, uninspired from above, can shew that this state of soul and body is founded in the reason and fitness of things?

Again: The origin of the soul, at what time it enters into the body, whether it be immediately created at its entrance into the body, or comes out of a pre-existent state, must have its fitness or reasonableness founded in the nature of things.

For who can say, that it is the same thing, whether human souls are created immediately for

for human bodies, or whether they come into them out of some *pre-existent state*? Now one of these ways may be exceeding fit and wise, and the other as entirely *unjust* and *unreasonable*, and yet when Reason left to its own light examines either of these ways, it finds itself *equally perplexed* with difficulties, and can affirm nothing with certainty about it.

Again: Who can say that it is the same thing to man, as a *moral agent*, or that he is to have the same treatment from God, or that the same *kinds* or *degrees* of piety must be exactly required, whether human souls be *fallen spirits*, that pre-existed before the creation of bodies, or were *immediately created*, as bodies were prepared for them?

Now here comes another act of *implicit faith* in natural religion, in a point of the *greatest moment* to the moral world. For as to God's proceeding in this matter of the greatest *justice* or *injustice* in his conduct over us, mere Reason has no ability to examine into it by any pretended fitness or unfitness founded in the nature of things; but must be forced to *believe* that God deals with us according to infinite wisdom and goodness, or else be amongst those judicious believers, that believe there is no God.

Again: The origin of *sin* and *evil*, or how it entered into the world consistently with the infinite wisdom of God, is a mystery of *natural religion*, which reason cannot unfold. For who can shew from the *reason* and *nature* of things, that it was *fit* and *reasonable*, for the providence of God to suffer sin and evil to enter, and

and continue in the world as they have? Here therefore the man of natural religion must drop his method of reasoning from the nature and fitness of things, and that in an article of the highest concern to the moral world, and be as mere a believer, as he that believes the most incomprehensible mystery of revealed religion.

Now as there have been in the several ages of the world, some *impatient, restless and presuming* spirits, who because they could not in these points explain the justice of God's providence, have taken refuge in horrid *Atheism*, so they made just the same *sober use* of their reason, as our *modern unbelievers*, who because they can't comprehend, as they would, the *fitness* and *necessity* of certain Christian doctrines, resign themselves up to an hardened *infidelity*. For it is just as wise and reasonable to allow of no mysteries in *Revelation*, as to allow of no mysteries or secrets in *Creation* and *Providence*.

And whenever this writer, or any other, shall think it a proper time, to attack *natural religion* with as much freedom, as he has now fallen upon *revealed*, he need not enter upon any *new hypothesis*, or *different way of reasoning*. For the same turn of thought, the same manner of cavilling may soon find materials in the natural state of man, for as large a bill of complaints against natural religion, and the mysteries of providence, as is here brought against revealed doctrines.

To proceed : If the *fitness of actions is founded in the nature and relations of beings*, then nothing

nothing can be fit for God to do, but so far as it is fit for the *Governor of all created beings*, whether on earth, or in any other part of the universe; and he cannot act fitly towards mankind, but by acting as is fit for the Governor of all beings.

Now what is fit for the *Governor of all created* nature to do in this or that particular part of his creation, is as much above our reason to *tell*, as it is above our power to *govern* all beings. And how mankind ought to be governed, with relation to the whole creation, of which they are so small a part, is a matter equally above our knowledge, because we know not how they are a part of the whole, or what relation they bear to any other part, or how their state affects the whole, or any other part, than we know what beings the whole consists of.

Now there is nothing that we know with more certainty than that God is Governor of the *whole*, and that mankind are a *part of the whole*; and that the uniformity and harmony of divine providence, must arise from his infinitely wise government of the *whole*; and therefore we have the utmost certainty, that we are *vastly incompetent* judges of the fitness or unfitness of any methods, that God uses in the government of so small a part of the universe, as mankind are.

For if the actions of God cannot have their *proper fitness*, unless they are according to the *incomprehensible greatness of his own nature*,
and

and according to his incomprehensible greatness, as *Lord* and *Governor of all created nature*; have we not the most undenial certainty, that the fitness of the divine providence over mankind, cannot possibly be seen by those, who are resolved to know nothing of God, but that which their own Reason can teach them?

Again: If the fitness of actions is founded in the relations of beings to one another, then the fitness of the actions of God's providence over mankind, must be in many instances altogether mysterious and incomprehensible to us.

For the relation which God bears to mankind, as their *all-perfect Creator* and continual *Preserver*, is a relation that our Reason conceives as imperfectly, and knows as little of, as it does of any of the divine attributes. When it compares it to that of a *Father* and his children, a *Prince* and his subjects, a *Proprietor* and his property, it has explained it in the best manner it can, but still has left it as much a *secret*, as we do the divine nature when we only say, it is *infinitely* superior to every thing that is *finite*.

By the natural Light of our Reason we may know with certainty, several effects of this relation, as that it puts us under the care and protection of a wise, and just, and merciful providence, and demands from us the highest instances of humility, duty, adoration and thanksgiving. But what it is in its own nature, what kind of state, or degree of *dependency* it signifies, what it is to exist in and by God, what

what it is to see by a *light* that is his, to act by a power from him, to live by a *life* in him; are things as incomprehensible to Reason, *left to itself*, as what it is to be in the *third heavens*, or to hear words that cannot be uttered.

But if this relation consists in these *inconceivable* things, in a communication of *life*, *light*, and *power*, if these are enjoyed in God, and in ourselves, our own and yet his, in a manner not to be explained by any thing that we ever heard, or saw; then we must necessarily be poor judges of what is fit for God to require of us, because of this *relation*. It teaches us nothing but the superficialness of our own knowledge, and the unfathomable depths of the divine perfections.

How little this Writer has considered the nature and manner of this *relation* between God and Man, may be seen by the following paragraphs. *The Holy Ghost*, says he, *cannot deal with men as rational creatures, but by proposing arguments to convince their understandings, and influence their wills, in the same manner as if proposed by other agents*. As absurd, as to say, God cannot *create* us as rational Beings, unless he creates us by such means, and in the same *manner*, as if we were created by other agents. For to suppose that other agents can possibly act upon our understanding, and will, in the *same manner* that God does; is as gross an absurdity, as to suppose that other agents can *create* us in the *same manner* that God creates us.

And to *confine* the manner of the Holy Ghost's acting upon us, to the manner of our acting upon one another by *arguments* and *syllogisms*, is as great weakness, as to *confine* the manner of God's creating us, to the manner of our making a *Statue* with *tools* and *instruments*.

But he proceeds and says, *For to go beyond this, would be making impressions on men, as a seal does on wax; to the confounding of their reason, and their liberty in chusing; and the man would then be merely passive, and the action would be the action of another being acting upon him, for which he could be no way accountable* *.

Here you see the Holy Spirit has but these two possible ways of acting upon men, it must either only propose an argument, just as a man may propose one, or it must act like a *seal upon wax*.

I only ask this writer, Whether God communicates *life*, and *strength*, and *understanding*, and *liberty of will* to us, only as men may communicate any thing to one another? or as a seal acts upon wax? If so, it may be granted, that the Holy Ghost cannot act upon us any other way.

But if it must be affirmed, that we do, by a continual influx from God, enjoy all these powers, and receive the continuance of all these faculties from him, not as men receive things from one another, nor as *wax* receives the

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the *impression* of the *seal*, but in a way as much above our conception, as creation is above our power; if we have all our *power* of acting, by a *continual communication* from him, and yet are free-agents, have all our *light* from him, and yet are *accountable intelligent Beings*; then, it must be great weakness to affirm, that the Holy Ghost cannot act upon us in the same manner: For it would be saying, God cannot act upon us as he does act upon us.

The short of the matter is this. Either this writer must affirm, that our *rational nature*, our *understanding faculties*, our *power of action*, our *liberty of will*, must *necessarily* subsist without the *continual action* of God upon them, or else he must grant, that God can *act* upon our *understandings and wills* without making us as *merely passive* as the wax under the seal.

This writer says, *Though the relation we stand in to God, is not artificial, as most are amongst men—yet this does not binder, but that we may know the end he had in being related to us as Creator and Governor, and what he requires of his creatures and subjects.* But how are we to know this? *This, says he, the Divine Nature, which contains in it all perfection and happiness, plainly points out to us* *.

If he had said, since God must act over us as Creator and Governor, according to his own infinite *perfection and happiness*, therefore his conduct over us may be very mysterious, he

had drawn a *plain* conclusion. But he proves all to be plain, because God is to govern us according to something that is not plain, according to his own *incomprehensible nature*.

His argument therefore proceeds thus. God must govern us according to his own *infinite perfection and happiness*; but we do not know what his infinite perfections and happiness are:

Therefore we plainly know how he is to govern us.

Now if this Writer is capable of taking such an argument as this to be demonstrative, it is no wonder that all his principles of Religion are founded upon demonstration.

But if he knows no more of what arises from the *Relation* between God and his creatures, than he has here demonstrated, he might be very well content with some farther knowledge from Divine Revelation.

It is because of this incomprehensible Relation between God and his creatures, that we are unavoidably ignorant of what God may justly require of us either in a state of *innocence* or *sin*. For as the fitness of actions between Beings *related*, must result from their respective Natures, so the incomprehensibility of the Divine Nature, on which the Relation between God and man is founded, makes it utterly impossible for mere natural reason to say, what *kind* of *homage*, or *worship*, he may fitly require of man in a state of *innocence*; or what *different* worship and homage he may, or must require of men, as *sinners*.

And

And to appeal to the infinite Perfections of God, as *plainly pointing this out*, is the same extravagance, as to appeal to the *incomprehensibility* of God, as a plain proof of our comprehending what God is.

As to the obligations of moral or social duties, which have their foundation in the conveniences of this life, and the several relations we bear to one another, these are the same in the state of *Innocence* or *Sin*, and we know that we truly act according to the Divine Will, when we act according to what these relations require of us.

But the question is, What distinct kind of *Homage*, or *Service*, or *Worship*, God may require us to render to Him, either in a state of *Innocence* or *Sin*, on account of that Relation he bears to us as an all-perfect Creator and Governor?

But this is a question that God alone can resolve.

Human Reason cannot enter into it, it has no principle to proceed upon in it. For as the *necessity* of Divine Worship and Homage, so the *particular matter* and *manner* of it, must have its reason in the Divine Nature.

Sacrifice, if considered only as an *human Invention*, could not be proved to be a reasonable service. Yet considered as a *Divine Institution*, it would be the greatest folly not to receive it as a reasonable service. For as we could see no reason for it, if it was of human

invention, so we should have the greatest reason to comply with it, because it was of Divine Appointment. Not as if the Divine Appointment altered the *nature* and *fitness* of things; but because nothing has the *nature* and *fitness* of Divine Worship, but because it is of Divine Appointment.

Man therefore, had he continued in a state of Innocence, and without Revelation, might have lived in an awful fear, and pious regard of God, and observed every duty both of moral and civil life, as an act of obedience to him. But he could have no foundation either to invent any particular *matter* or *manner* of Divine Worship himself, or to reject any that was appointed by God, as *unnecessary*. It would have been ridiculous to have pleaded his innocence, as having no need of a Divine Worship? For who can have greater reason, or be fitter to worship God, than innocent Beings? It would have been more absurd, to have objected the sufficiency and perfection of their reason; for why should men reject a *revealed method and manner* of Divine Worship and Service, because God had given them sense and reason of their own, sufficient for the duties of social and civil life?

And as reason in a state of such innocence and perfection, could not have any pretence to state, or appoint the matter or manner of Divine Worship, so when the state of innocence was changed for that of sin, it then became more difficult for bare reason to know what kind

kind of Homage, or Worship could be acceptable to God from sinners.

For what the *Relation* betwixt God and sinners makes it fit and reasonable for God to require or accept of them, cannot be determined by human reason.

This is a *new State*, and the foundation of a *new Relation*, and nothing can be fit for God to do in it, but what has its *fitness resulting* from it. We have nothing to help our conceptions of the forementioned *relative Characters* of God, as our *Governor* and *Preserver*, but what we derive from our idea of human *Fathers* and *Governors*. Which idea only helps us to comprehend these *relations*, just as our idea of human power helps us to comprehend the *Omnipotence* of God. For a father or governor, no more represents the *true state* of God as our *Governor* and *Preserver*, than our living in our Father's *family*, represents the *true manner* of our living in God.

These relations are both very plain, and very mysterious; they are very plain and certain, as to the *reality* of their existence; and highly mysterious and inconceivable, as to the *manner* of their existence.

That which is *plain* and *certain*, in these relative characters of God, plainly shews our obligations to every instance of *duty*, *homage*, *adoration*, *love* and *gratitude*.

And that which is *mysterious* and *inconceivable* in them, is a just and solid foundation of

that profound humility, awful reverence, internal piety, and tremendous sense of the divine Majesty, with which devout and pious persons think of God, and assist at the offices and institutions of religion. Which excites in them a higher zeal for doctrines and institutions of divine revelation, than for all things human ; that fills them with regard and reverence for all things, places, and offices, that are either by divine or human authority, appointed to assist and help their desired intercourse with God.

And if some people, by a long and strict attention to *Reason*, clear ideas, the fitness and unfitness of things, have at last arrived at a demonstrative certainty, that all these sentiments of piety and devotion, are mere *bigotry*, *superstition*, and *enthusiasm* ; I shall only now observe, that *youthful extravagance*, *passion*, and *debauchery*, by their own *natural tendency*, without the assistance of any other guide, seldom fail of making the same discovery. And though it is not reckoned any reflection upon *great wits*, when they hit upon the same thought, yet it may seem some disparagement of that *reason* and *philosophy*, which teaches *old men* to think and judge the same of religion, that *passion* and *extravagance* teaches the young.

To return : As there is no state in human life, that can give us a true idea of any of the forementioned relative characters of God, so this relative state of God towards sinners is still more remote, and less capable of being truly com-

comprehended by any thing observable in the relations, betwixt a *judge* and criminals, a *creditor* and his debtors, a *physician* and his patients, a father or prince, and their disobedient children and subjects.

For none of these states separately, nor all of them jointly considered, give us any just idea, either of the *nature* and *guilt* of sin, or how God is to deal with sinners, on the account of the relation he bears to them.

And to ask, whether God in punishing sinners, acts as a *physician* towards patients, or as a *creditor* towards debtors, or as a *prince* towards rebels, or a *judge* over criminals; is the same weakness, as to ask, whether God as our *continual preserver*, acts as our parents, from whom we have our *maintenance*, or as a prince, that only *protects us*. For as the *maintenance* and *protection* that we receive from our parents and prince, are not proper and true representations of the *nature* and *manner* of our *preservation* in God, but only the properest words that human language affords us, to speak of things not human, but divine and inconceivable in their own proper natures: So a *physician* and his patients, a *creditor* and his debtors, a *prince* and his rebels, or a *judge* over criminals, neither separately nor jointly considered, are proper and strict representations of the *reasons* and *manner* of God's proceedings with sinners, but only help us to a more proper language to speak about them, than any other states of human life.

To

To ask, whether *sin* hath solely the *nature* of an offence, against a prince or a father, and so is pardonable by mere goodness; whether it is like an *error* in a *road* or *path*, and so is entirely at an end, when the right path is taken; whether its guilt hath the nature of a debt, and so is capable of being discharged, just as a debt is; whether it affects the soul, as a *wound* or *disease* affects the body, and so ought only to move God to act as a good physician? all these questions are as vain, as to ask, whether knowledge in God is really *thinking*, or his nature a real *substance*. For as his knowledge and nature cannot be strictly defined, but are capable of being signified by the terms *thinking* and *substance*, so the nature of sin is not *strictly represented* under any of these characters, but is capable of receiving *some representation* from every one of them.

When sin is said to be an offence against God, it is to teach us, that we have infinitely more reason to dread it on *God's account*, than to dread any offence against our parents, or governors.

When it is compared to a *debt*, it is to signify, that our sins make us accountable to God, not in the *same manner*, but with the same certainty, as a debtor is answerable to his creditor; and because it has some likeness to a debt, that of ourselves we are not able to pay.

When it is compared to a *wound*, or *disease* in the body, it is not to teach us, that it may

may as justly and easily be healed as bodily wounds, but to help us to conceive the greatness of its evil ; that, as diseases bring death to the body, so sin brings a worse kind of death upon the soul.

Since therefore the *nature* and *guilt* of sin can only so far be known, as to make it highly to be *dreaded*, but not so known as to be *fully understood*, by any thing we can compare it to.

Since the *relation* which God bears to *sinners*, can only be so known, as to make it highly reasonable to prostrate ourselves before him, in every instance of humility and penitence ; but not so fully known as to teach us how, or in what manner, God must deal with us ; it plainly follows, that if God is not an *arbitrary* Being, but acts according to a *fitness*, resulting from this relation, he must, in this respect, act by a *rule* or *reason* known only to himself, and such as we cannot *possibly* state from the *reason* and *nature* of things.

For if the nature of things, and the fitness of actions resulting from their relations, is to be the rule of our Reason, then *Reason* must be here at a full stop, and can have no more light or knowledge to proceed upon, in stating the *nature*, the *guilt*, or proper *atonement* of sin in men, than of sin in *Angels*.

For *Reason*, by consulting the *nature* and *fitness* of things, can no more tell us, what the *guilt* of sin is, what *hurt* it does us, how far

far it enters into, and alters our very nature, what contrariety to, and separation from God, it necessarily brings upon us, or what supernatural means are, or are not, necessary to abolish it; our Reason can no more tell this, than our senses can tell us, what is the *inward*, and what is the *outward* light of Angels.

Ask Reason, what effect sin has upon the soul, and it can tell you no more, than if you had asked, what effect the omnipresence of God has upon the soul.

Ask Reason, and the nature of things, what is, or ought to be, the true nature of an atonement for sin, how far it is like paying a debt, reconciling a difference, or healing a wound, or how far it is different from them? and it can tell you no more, than if you had asked, what is the true degree of power that preserves us in existence, how far it is like that which at first created us, and how far it is different from it.

All these enquiries are, by the nature of things, made impossible to us, so long as we have no light but from our own natural capacities, and we cannot take upon us to be knowing, and philosophers, in these matters, but by deserting our Reason, and giving ourselves up to vision and imagination.

And we have as much authority from the reason and nature of things, to appeal to hunger and thirst, and sensual pleasure, to tell us how our souls shall live in the beatifick presence of God, as to appeal to our reason and logick,

logick, to demonstrate how sin is to be *atoned*, or the soul *altered*, *prepared*, and *purified*, for future happiness.

For God has no more given us our Reason to *settle* the nature of an atonement for sin ; or to find out what can, or cannot, take away its guilt, than he has given us *senses* and *appetites* to state the nature, or discover the ingredients, of future happiness.

And he who rejects the *atonement* for sins made by the Son of God, as *needless*, because he cannot prove it to be *necessary*, is as extravagant, as he that should deny that God created him by his *only Son*, because he did not *remember* it. For our memory is as proper a faculty to tell us, whether God at first created us, and all things, by his *only Son*, as our *Reason* is to tell us, whether we ought to be restored to God, with, or without the mediation of Jesus Christ.

When therefore this writer says, *Can any thing be more evident, than that if doing evil be the only cause of God's displeasure, that the ceasing to do evil, must take away that displeasure?*

Just as if he had said, if conversing with a *leper* has been the only cause of a man's getting a *leprosy*, must not departing from him, be the removal of the *leprosy*? For if any one, guessing at the *guilt* of sin, and its *effects* on the soul, should compare it to a *leprosy* in the body, he can no more say, that he has reached

its real, internal evil, than he, that comparing the happiness of heaven to a crown of glory, can be said to have described its real happiness.

This writer has no occasion to appeal to reason, and the nature of things, if he can be thus certain about things, whose nature is not only obscure, but *impossible* to be known. For it is as impossible for him to know the guilt and effects of sin, as to know the shape of an Angel. It is as impossible to know by the mere light of reason what God's *displeasure* at sin is, what *contrariety* to, or *separation* from sinners it implies, or how it *obliges* God to deal with them; as to know what the internal essence of God is. Our author therefore has here found the utmost degree of evidence, where it was *impossible* for him to have the *smallest* degree of knowledge.

For though it is very evident, that in the case of sin, Reason can prescribe nothing but repentance; yet it is equally evident, that Reason cannot say, nothing more is required, to destroy the effects of sin, and to put the sinner in the *same state*, as if it had never been committed.

If a man, having *murdered* twenty of his fellow creatures, should afterward be sorry for it, and wish that he had a power to bring them to life again, or to create others in their stead, would this be an *evident* proof, that he was no *murderer*, and that he had never killed one man in his life? Will his ceasing to kill, and wishing

wishing he had a power to create others in their stead, be a *proof*, that he is just in the *same state* with God, as if he had never murdered a man in his life? But, unless this can be said, unless a man's repentance sufficiently proves that he *never* was a sinner, it cannot be evident, that repentance is sufficient to put a man in the *same state*, as if he never had sinned.

He therefore that says, *If sin be the only cause of God's displeasure, must not ceasing from sin take away his displeasure?* has just as much sense and reason on his side, as if he had said, if a man's *murdering* of himself, is the cause of God's displeasure, must not his restoring himself to life again, take away God's displeasure?

For there is as much foundation in reason, and the nature of things, to affirm, that the soul of a *self-murderer* must have a sufficient power to undo the effects of murder, and put him in his former state; as to affirm, that *every sinner* must have a sufficient natural power of undoing all the effects of sin, and putting himself in the same state as if he had never sinned.

This objection therefore, against any *supernatural* means of atoning for sin, taken from the *sufficiency* of our own repentance, is as *clear* and *philosophical*, as that knowledge that is without *any ideas*; and as justly to be relied upon, as that *conclusion* which has no *premises*.

This

This writer has two more objections against the atonement for sin, made by Jesus Christ. First, as it is an *human sacrifice*, which nature itself abhors; and which was looked upon as the great abomination of idolatrous *pagan* worship.

The *cruelty*, *injustice*, and *impiety*, of shedding *human blood* in the sacrifices of the *pagan* religion, is fully granted: but *Reason* cannot thence bring the smallest objection against the sacrifice of Christ, as it was *human*.

For how can Reason be more disregarded, than in such an argument as this? The *pagans* were unjust, cruel, and impious, in offering *human blood* to their false gods, therefore the true God cannot receive any *human sacrifice* for sin, or allow any persons to die, as a punishment for sin.

For, if no *human sacrifice* can be fit for God to receive, because *human Sacrifices*, as parts of *pagan* worship, were unjust and impious; then it would follow, that the *mortality*, to which all mankind are appointed by God, must have the *same cruelty* and *injustice* in it. Now that *death* is a punishment for sin, and that all mankind are by death offered as a *sacrifice* for sin, is not only a doctrine of revealed Religion, but the plain dictate of Reason. For, though it is Revelation alone that can teach us, how God threatned death, as the punishment of a particular sin, yet reason must be obliged to acknowledge, that men die, because they are sinners. But, if men die because

cause they are sinners, and reason itself must receive this, as the most justifiable cause of death; then reason must allow, that the death of all mankind is received by the true God, as a *sacrifice* for sin. But if reason must acknowledge the death of all mankind, as a sacrifice for sin, then it can have no just objection against the sacrifice of Christ, *because* it was *human*.

Revelation therefore teaches nothing more hard to be believed on this point, than reason teaches. For if it be just and fit in God, to *appoint* and *devote* all men to death, as the proper *punishment*, and *means* of their deliverance from their sins; how can it be proved to be unjust and unfit in God, to receive the death of Jesus Christ, for the same ends, and to render thereby the common death and sacrifice of mankind truly effectual?

I need not take upon me to prove the *fitness* and *reasonableness* of God's procedure in the *mortality* of mankind; Revelation is not under any necessity of proving this; because it is no difficulty that arises from revelation, but equally belongs to natural religion; and both of them must acknowledge it to be fit and reasonable; not because it can be proved to be so from the nature of things, but is to be believed to be so, by faith and piety.

But if the necessary faith and piety of natural religion, will not suffer us to think it *inconsistent* with the justice and goodness of God, to appoint all mankind victims to death

on the account of sin, then *reason*, or *natural religion*, can have no objection against the sacrifice of Christ, as it is an *human sacrifice*.

And all that *revelation* adds to *natural religion*, on the point of *human sacrifice*, is only this ; the knowledge of *one*, that gives *merit*, *effect*, and *sanctification*, to all the rest.

Secondly, It is objected, that the atonement made by Jesus Christ, represents God as punishing the *innocent* and acquitting the *guilty*; or, as punishing the innocent *instead* of the guilty.

But this proceeds all upon mistake : for the atonement made by Jesus Christ, though it procures pardon for the guilty, yet it does not acquit them, or excuse them from any punishment, or suffering for sin, which *reason could impose upon them*. Natural religion calls men to repentance for their sins : the atonement made by Jesus Christ does not acquit them from it, or pardon them without it ; but calls them to a *severer* repentance, a *higher* self-punishment and penance, than natural religion, alone, prescribes. So that *reason* cannot accuse this atonement, of *acquitting* the guilty ; since it brings them under a necessity of doing *more*, and performing a *severer* repentance, than *reason*, alone, can impose upon them.

God therefore does not by this proceeding, (as is unreasonably said) shew his *dislike*

like of the innocent and his approbation of the wicked.

For how can God be thought to punish our blessed Saviour out of *dislike*, if his sufferings are represented of such infinite merit with him? Or how can he shew thereby his *approbation* of the guilty, whose repentance is not *acceptable* to him, till recommended by the infinite merits of Jesus Christ?

Reason therefore has nothing that it can justly object, against the atonement made by our blessed Lord, either as it was an *human sacrifice*, or as *freeing the guilty*, and punishing the innocent in their stead; because this very sacrifice calls people to a *higher state* of suffering and punishment for *sin*, than reason, alone, could oblige them to undergo.

As to the fitness and reasonableness of our blessed Lord's sufferings, as he was God and man; and the *nature* and *degree* of their worth; reason can no more enter into this matter, or *prove* or *disprove* any thing about it, than it can enter into the state of the whole creation, and shew, how it could, or could not, be in the whole, better than it is.

For you may as well ask any of your *senses*, as ask your *reason* this principal question, *Whether any supernatural means be necessary for the atonement of the sins of mankind?* Or, supposing it necessary, whether the *mediation*, *death*, and *intercession* of Jesus Christ, as God and man, be that true *supernatural means*?

For as the fitness or unfitness of any *supernatural* means, for the atonement of sin, must result from the *incomprehensible relation* God bears to sinners, as it must have such *necessity*, *worth*, and *dignity*, as this relation *requires*, and because it requires it ; it necessarily follows, that if God acts according to *this relation*, the *fitness* of his actions cannot be according to our comprehension.

Again : Supposing some *supernatural means* to be necessary, for destroying the guilt and power of sin ; or that the *mediation*, *sufferings*, and *intercession*, of the Son of God incarnate, is that true *supernatural means*, it necessarily follows, that a revelation of such, or any other *supernatural means*, cannot possibly be made obvious to our reason and senses, as the things of human life, or the transactions amongst men are ; but can only be so revealed, as to become just occasions of our *faith*, *humility*, *adoration*, and *pious resignation*, to the divine wisdom and goodness.

For, to say that such a thing is *supernatural*, is only saying, that it is something, which, by the *necessary state* of our own nature, we are as incapable of knowing, as we are incapable of seeing *spirits*.

If therefore *supernatural* and divine things are by the letter of Scripture ever revealed to us, they cannot be revealed to us, as they are in their *own nature* : for if they could, such things would not be *supernatural*, but such as were suited to our capacities.

If

If an *angel* could appear to us, as it is in its own nature, then we should be *naturally* capable of seeing angels; but, because our nature is not *capable* of such a sight, and angels are, as to us, *supernatural* objects; therefore, when *angels* appear to men, they must appear, not as they are in themselves, but in some *human*, or *corporal* form, that their appearance may be suited to our capacities.

It is just thus, when any *supernatural* or *divine* matter is revealed by God, it can no more possibly be revealed to us, as it is in its *own nature*, than an *Angel* can appear to us, or make itself visible by us as it is in its own nature; but such supernatural matter can only be revealed to us, by being represented to us, by its likeness to something, that we already *naturally* know.

Thus revelation teaches us this *supernatural* matter; that Jesus Christ is making *perpetual intercession for us in heaven*: For Christ's *real state*, or *manner* of existence with God in heaven, in regard to his Church, cannot, as it is in its *own nature*, be described to us; it is in this respect ineffable, and incomprehensible. And therefore, this high and inconceivable manner of Christ's existence with God in heaven, in regard to his church, is revealed to us under an idea, that gives us the truest representation of it, that we are capable of; viz. the idea of a *perpetual intercession* for his church.

But if any one should thence infer, that the Son of God must therefore either be always upon his knees in acts of *mental* or *vocal* prayer, or *prostrate* in some humble form of a suppliant, he would make a very weak inference.

Because this revealed Idea of Christ, as a perpetual Intercessor in heaven, is only a comparative representation of something, that cannot be *directly* and *plainly* known as it is in its own nature; and only teaches us, how to believe something, though imperfectly, yet *truly* and *usefully*, of an incomprehensible matter.

Just as our own ideas of *wisdom* and *goodness* do not teach us what the divine wisdom and goodness are in their *own natures*, but only help us to believe something *truly* and *usefully* of those perfections of God, which are in themselves inconceivable by us.

But then there is no inferring any thing from these ideas, by which divine and supernatural things are represented to us, but only the *truth* and *certainty* of that *likeness* under which they are represented.

Thus from our own idea of goodness in ourselves, we can infer nothing concerning goodness, as it is a perfection inherent in God, but only this, that there certainly is in God some *inconceivable, infinite* perfection, *truly answerable* to that which we call goodness in ourselves, though as *infinitely* different from it, as *Omni-potence*

potence is infinitely different from all that we naturally know of *power*.

But then we can proceed no farther than to the *truth* and *certainty* of this *likeness*; we cannot by any farther considerations of the *nature* and *manner* of goodness, as it is in ourselves, infer any thing farther, as to the *nature* and *manner* of the *divine goodness*. This is as impossible, as to state the real *nature* and *manner* of *Omnipotence*, by considering the *particulars* of *human power*.

In like manner, our revealed idea of Jesus Christ as an *Intercessor* for us in heaven, gives us the utmost certainty that he is in heaven for our benefit, in a manner *truly* and *fully* answerable to that of a *powerful Intercessor*. But if from considering our own ideas of *human Intercessors*, we should thence pretend to infer the *real supernatural* manner of Christ's existence in heaven, we should fall into the same absurdity, as if we undertook to represent the *true nature* of *Omnipotence*, by considering what we knew of the *nature* and *manner* of *human power*.

Again: When it is by the letter of Scripture revealed to us, that the blessed Jesus is the one *Mediator* between God and man; that he is the *Atonement*, the *Propitiation*, and *Satisfaction* for our sins: These expressions only teach us *as much* outward knowledge of so great a mystery, as *human language* can represent. But they do not teach us the *real or perfect* nature of Christ's *state* between God and sinners. For

that being a *divine* and *supernatural* matter, cannot by any outward words be revealed to us as it is in its *own Nature*, any more than the *essence* of God can be made *visible* to our eyes of Flesh.

But these expressions teach us thus much with certainty, that there is in the *state* of Christ between God and sinners, something infinitely and inconceivably beneficial to us; and *truly answerable* to all that we mean by *mediation*, *atonement*, *propitiation*, and *satisfaction*.

And though the *real, internal manner*, of this mediation and atonement, as it is in its *own nature*, is *incomprehensible* to the natural man, yet this does not lessen our knowledge of the *truth* and *certainty* of it, any more than the *incomprehensibility* of the divine nature, lessens our *certainty* of its real existence.

And as our idea of God, though consisting of incomprehensible perfections, helps us to a real and certain knowledge of the divine nature; and though all mysterious, is yet the solid foundation of all piety; so our idea of Jesus Christ, as our *mediator* and *atonement*, though it be mighty incomprehensible in itself, as to its real nature, yet helps us to a *certain* and *real* knowledge of Christ, as our *mediator* and *atonement*; and, though full of mystery, is yet full of motives to the highest degrees of piety, devotion, love, and gratitude unto God.

All objections therefore, raised from any difficulties about the nature of *atonements*, *propitiations*, and *satisfactions*, as these words are used to signify in human life, and common language, are vain, and entirely groundless.

For all these objections proceed upon this supposition, that *atonement*, or *satisfaction*, when attributed to Jesus Christ, signify neither *more* nor *less*, nor operate in any other manner, than when they are used as terms in *human laws*, or in *civil life*: Take away this supposition, and all objections are entirely removed with it.

Thus our author thinks this an unanswerable difficulty in the present case, when he asks, *How Sins freely pardoned, could want any expiation?* Or how, after a full *equivalent paid, and adequate satisfaction given, all could be mercy, and pure forgiveness**?

And yet all this difficulty is founded upon this absurd supposition, that atonement and satisfaction, when attributed to Jesus Christ, signify neither more nor less, than atonements and satisfactions, when spoken of in human laws, and human life.

Which is full as absurd, as to suppose, that *power* and *life*, when attributed to God, signify neither more nor less, than when they are spoken of men: For there is no reason why we should think there is any thing mysterious and incomprehensible in *power* and *life*, when attributed to God; but what is the same reason

son for our thinking, that *atonement* and *satisfaction*, when ascribed to the Son of God, must be mysterious and incomprehensible.

To return: I have granted this writer his great principle, *that the relations of things and persons, and the fitness resulting from thence, is the sole rule of God's actions*: and I have granted it upon this supposition, that it must thence follow, that God must act according to his *own nature*; and therefore nothing could be fit for God to do, or worthy of him, but what had the reason of its fitness in his own nature: and if so, then the *rule* of his actions could not fall within our comprehension. And consequently, *reason alone*, could not be a *competent judge* of God's proceedings; or say, what God might, or might not, require of us: and therefore I have, by this means, plainly turned his main argument against himself, and made it fully confute that doctrine, which he intended to found upon it.

But though I have thus far, and for this reason, granted the *nature* and *relations* of things and beings, to be the rule of God's actions, because that plainly supposes, that therefore his *own nature* must be the rule of his actions; yet since our *author*, and other modern opposers of revealed doctrines of religion, hold it in another sense, and mean by it, I know not what *eternal, immutable* reasons and relations of things, *independent* of any being, and which are a *common rule and law of God and man*, I entirely declare

declare against it, as an erroneous and groundless opinion.

Thus, when this writer says, *If the relations between things, and the fitness resulting from thence, be not the sole rule of God's actions, must he not be an arbitrary being?* As he here means some *eternal, immutable relations, independent of God*; so, to suppose, that God cannot be a *wise and good being*, unless such *eternal, independent relations, be the sole rule of his actions*, is as erroneous, as to affirm, that God cannot be *omniscient*, unless *mathematical demonstrations be his sole manner of knowing all things*. And it is just as reasonable to fix God's knowledge *solely in mathematical demonstrations*, that we may thence be assured of his *infallible knowledge*, as to make I know not what *independent relations of things, the sole rule of his actions*, that we may thence be assured, he is not *arbitrary*, but a *wise and good Being*.

And we have as strong reasons to believe God to be, in the highest degree, *wise and good*, without knowing on *what*, his wisdom and goodness is *founded*; as we have to believe him to be *omniscient*, and *eternal*, without knowing on *what*, his *omniscience is founded*; or to *what*, his *eternity* is owing. And we have the same reason to hold it a vain and fruitless enquiry, to ask what *oblige*s God to be *Wise and Good*, as to ask what *oblige*s him to be *Omniscient, or Eternal*.

And

And as it would be absurd to ascribe the *Existence* of God to *any cause*, or found it upon any *independent relations* of things, so it is the same absurdity, to ascribe the infinite wisdom and goodness of God to *any cause*, or found them upon any independent relations of things.

Nor do we any more *lose* the notion, or *lessen* the certainty of the Divine Wisdom and Goodness, because we cannot say on *what* they are founded, or to *what* they are to be ascribed, than we *lose* the notion of God, or render his existence *uncertain*, because it cannot be founded on any thing, or ascribed to any cause.

And as in our account of the existence of things, we are obliged to have recourse to a Being, whose existence must not be ascribed to *any cause*, because every thing cannot have a cause, no more than every thing can be created, so in our account of *Wisdom* and *Goodness*, there is the same necessity of having recourse to an infinite Wisdom and Goodness, that never *began* to be, and that is as different as to its *reason* and *manner* of existence, from all other wisdom and goodness, that have a beginning, as the *existence* of God is *different* from the existence of the creatures.

But if it be necessary to hold, that there is an infinite wisdom and goodness that *never began* to be, then it is as necessary to affirm, that such wisdom and goodness can no more be *founded* upon the *relations* of things, than the *unbeginning existence* of God can be *founded* upon the

the existence of things. And to seek for any *reasons* of a wisdom and goodness that could not begin to be, but was always in the *same infinite state*, is like seeking the cause of that which can have no cause, or asking *what it is, that contains infinity.*

But to derive the wisdom and goodness of God from the directions he receives from the *Relations* of things, because our wisdom and goodness is directed by them, is as weak and vain, as to found his *knowledge* upon sensation and reflection, because our rational knowledge is *necessarily founded* upon them.

When therefore this writer saith, *Infinite wisdom can have no commands, but what are founded on the unalterable reason of things* *; he might as justly have said, an *infinite Creator* can have no *power* of creating, but what is founded on the *unalterable nature* of creatures.

For the *reason* of things, is just as unalterable, as the *nature* of creatures. And if the *reasons* and *relations* of things are nothing else but their *manner* of existence, or the *state* of their nature, certainly the *relations* of things must have the same *beginning*, and the same *alterable* or *unalterable nature*, as the things from whence they flow. Unless it can be said, that a thing may exist in *such a manner*, though it does not exist at all.

Nothing is more certain, than that the *relations* of things is only the *particular state* of

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of their nature, or *manner* of existence ; there can therefore no eternal, and unalterable relations exist, but of things that eternally and unalterably exist. Unless a thing may be said to exist eternally and unalterably in such a particular state of nature, or *manner* of existence, and yet have no eternal existence.

When therefore he says again, *The will of God is always determined by the nature and reason of things* * ; It is the same as if he had said, the omnipotence of God is always determined by the nature of causes and effects. For as all causes and effects are what they are, and owe their *nature* to the omnipotence of God, so the relations of things are what they are, and owe their nature to the wisdom and will of God.

Nor does this dependence of the relations of things on the will of God, destroy the nature of relations, or make them doubtful, any more than the existence of things depending on the power of God, destroys the certainty of their existence, or renders it doubtful. For as God cannot make things to exist, and not to exist at the same time, though their existence depends upon his power, so neither can he make things to have such relations, and yet not to have such relations at the same time, though their relations depend upon his will.

So that the ascribing the relations of things to the will of God, from whence alone they can proceed, brings no uncertainty to those duties or rules of life, which flow from such relations,

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relations, but leaves the state of nature with all its relations, and the duties which flow from them, in the greatest certainty, so long as nature itself is continued ; and when that either *ceases entirely*, or is only *altered*, it is not to be wondered at, if all its relations cease, or are altered with it.

Our author says, *Dare any one say, that God's laws are not founded on the eternal reason of things* * ?

I dare say it with the same assurance, as that his *existence* is not founded on the *eternal existence* of things. And that it is the same extravagance to say, that God's laws are founded on the *eternal reasons* of things, as to say, that his *power* is founded on the *eternal capacities* of things. For the *capacities* of things have just the same *solidity* and *eternity*, as the relations of things have, and are just such *independent realities*, as they are: And are just the same *proper materials* to found the *omnipotence* of God upon, as the relations of things are, to found his infinite wisdom upon.

And as we can say, that the *omnipotence* of God in preserving and supporting the creation, will certainly act *suitably* to itself, and *consistent* with that *omnipotence* which first made things be what they are, and put nature into such a state of causes and effects as it is in ; so we can say, that the *infinite wisdom* of God in giving laws to the world, will act *suitably* to itself,

* Page 425.

itself, and *consistent* with that wisdom which at first made the *nature* and *relations* of the rational world be what they are.

But then as the *omnipotence* of God, though it acts suitably to the laws and state of the creation, and the nature of causes and effects, which it first ordained, yet cannot be said to be founded upon the nature of causes and effects, because neither causes nor effects have *any nature*, but what they *owe* to omnipotence; so the infinite wisdom of God, though in giving laws to the world, it acts *suitably* to the natures and relations of rational beings, yet cannot be said to be *founded* upon such relations, because such relations are the *effects* of the divine wisdom, and owe their existence to it.

And the *reason* or *relations* of things shew God's *antecedent* wisdom, and are effects of it, just as the nature of *causes* and *effects* shew his *antecedent* power, and are the effects of it. And as he is infinitely powerful, but not from the *nature* of causes and effects; so he is infinitely wise, but not from the *reason* and *nature* of things.

Again; if God is *infinite* wisdom, then his wisdom cannot be founded on the relations of things, unless things *finite*, and relations that began to be, can be the foundation of that wisdom which is infinite, and could not begin to be.

And to ask what the infinite wisdom of God can be founded upon, if it is not founded

ed upon the *natures* and *relations* of things, is the same absurdity, as to ask, How God's wisdom could be *without* a beginning, if we cannot tell *how it began?* For if his wisdom is infinite, it can no more be founded upon any thing, or have any reason of its existence, than it can have any thing before it.

Therefore to ask, *what* it is founded upon, when it can have no foundation upon *any thing*, is asking, what an *independent* being is dependent upon, or *how* that began, which could have *no* beginning?

And to ask the reason or foundation of *any one* of the divine attributes, is the same as asking the reason or foundation of them all. And to seek for the reason or foundation of *all* the divine attributes, is seeking for the *cause* of God's existence.

And as we do not come to God's existence, till we come to the *end of causes*, so nothing that is divine, can be attributed to any cause.

Nor is it any more a contradiction to say, there is something whose nature is without any cause or foundation of its existence, than to say, something exists without ever *beginning* to exist. For as nothing can have a beginning, but as it proceeds from some cause; so that which can have no beginning, can have no cause. If therefore the divine wisdom ever *began* to be *infinite*, and we could know when that beginning was, we should have some pretence to search for *that*, upon which its infinity

nity was *founded*; but if it never could begin to be, then to seek for its reason, or foundation, is seeking for its beginning.

This writer affirms, that God's wisdom and goodness must be founded on the nature and reason of things, otherwise it could not be proved, that God was not an *arbitrary being*.

Now to seek for reasons to prove that God is not an arbitrary being, that is, a being of the *highest freedom* and *independency*, that does every thing according to his *own will* and *pleasure*, is as vain, as to seek for reasons to prove, that *all things* and *all natures* are not the effect of his *will*. For if every thing besides God, received its existence from him; if every thing that exists, is the effect of his will, and he can do nothing, but because he *wills* the doing it, must he not be free and arbitrary in as *high* a manner, as he is powerful?

For if God is omnipotent, he must act according to his own will. And to say, that his *will* must be *governed* and *directed* by his wisdom and goodness, is the same, as to say his omnipotence must be governed by something *more powerful*. For if either his *will*, or his *omnipotence* wanted to be governed, there could be nothing to govern them; unless we could suppose, that he had a *will superior* to his will, and a power *superior* to his omnipotence. And though *will* and *power* when considered, as *blind*, or *imperfect* faculties in men, may pass for *humour* and *caprice*, yet as attributes of God, they have the *perfection* of God.

This

This writer says, *It is not in our power to love the Deity, whilst we consider him to be an arbitrary being, acting out of humour and caprice* *.

But if God's will is as essentially opposite to humour and caprice, as his omnipotence is essentially opposite to weakness and inability; then it is as absurd to suppose, that God must act according to humour and caprice, because he acts according to his own will, as to suppose that he must act with inability, because he acts by his omnipotence.

And if the will of God, *as such*, is in the highest state of perfection, then we have the highest reason to love and adore God, because he is arbitrary, and acts according to his own all-perfect will. And if it be asked, what it is that makes the will of God all-perfect, it may as well be asked, what it is that makes him omnipotent, or makes him to exist. For, as has been already observed, we have not found out a God, till we have found a being that has no cause; so we have not found the will of God, till we have found a will, that has no mover, or director, or cause of its perfection. For that will which never began to be, can no more be any thing, but what it is in itself, than it can begin to be.

And if any of God's attributes wanted to be governed and directed by the other, it might as well be said, that his infinite goodness was governed by his will, as that his will

was governed by his goodness, because he cannot be good against his will.

That which makes people imagine, that *will alone* is not so adorable, is because they consider it as a blind imperfect faculty, that wants to be directed. But what has such a will as this to do with the *will of God*?

For if the will of God is as *perfect* a *will*, as his omniscience is a *perfect knowledge*, then we are as sure, that the *will of God* cannot want any direction, or *will* any thing amiss, as we are, that his omniscience cannot need any information, or fall into any mistake. And if the *will of God* wanted any direction or government, it is impossible it should have it; for having no superior, it could only be so governed, because it *willed* it, and therefore must be always under its own government.

All the perfection therefore that can be ascribed to God, must be ascribed to his *will*, not as if it was the production of his will, (for nothing in God is produced) but as eternally, essentially, and infinitely inherent in it.

And as God's will has thus all the perfection of the divine nature, and has no rule, or reason, or motive to any goodness, that comes from it, but its own *nature* and *state* in God; so this great will is the only law of all creatures, and they are all to obey and conform to it, for this reason, because it is the will of God.

Nothing has a *sufficient moral* reason, or fitness to be done, but because it is the will of God that it should be done.

It may be asked, Is there then no *reason* or *nature of things*? Yes; as certainly as there are things. But the nature and reason of things, considered *independently* of the divine will, or *without* it, have no more *obligation* in them, than a *divine worship* considered independently of, and without any regard to the *existence* of God. For the *will* of God is as absolutely necessary to found all *moral obligation* upon, as the *existence* of God is necessary to be the foundation of religious worship. And the fitness of *moral obligations*, without the *will* of God, is only like the fitness of a *religious worship* without the *existence* of God.

And it is as just to say, that he destroys the *reason* of religion and piety, who founds it upon the nature and *existence* of God, as to say, he saps the foundation of moral obligations, who founds them upon the *will* of God. And as religion cannot be justly or solidly defended, but by shewing its connexion with, and dependence upon God's *existence*; so neither can moral obligations be asserted with strength and reason, but by shewing them to be the *will* of God.

It may again be asked, Can God make that fit in *itself*, which is in *itself absolutely unfit to be done*?

This question consists of improper terms. For God's will no more makes actions to be fit *in themselves*, than it makes *things* to exist *in, or of themselves*. No things, nor any actions have any *absolute* fitness, of and in *themselves*.

A *gift*, a *blow*, the making a *wound*, or *shedding* of *blood*, considered in *themselves*, have no *absolute* fitness, but are fit or unfit according to any variety of accidental circumstances.

When therefore God by his will makes any thing fit to be done, he does not make the thing fit in *itself*, which is just in the *same state* considered in *itself*, that it was before, but it becomes fit for the person to do it, because he can only be happy, or do that which is fit for him to do, by doing the will of God.

For instance, the *bare eating* a fruit, considered in *itself*, is neither fit nor unfit. If a fruit is appointed by God for our food and nourishment, then it is as fit to eat it, as to preserve our lives. If a fruit is poisonous, then it is as unfit to eat it, as to commit self-murder. If eating of a fruit is prohibited by an express order of God, then it is as unfit to eat it, as to eat our own damnation.

But in none of these instances is the eating or not eating, considered in *itself*, *fit* or *unfit*; but has all its fitness, or unfitness, from such circum-

circumstances, as are entirely owing to the will of God.

Supposing therefore God to require a person to do something, which according to his present circumstances, *without* that command, he ought not to do, God does not make that which is *absolutely* unfit in *itself*, fit to be done; but only adds *new circumstances* to an action, that is neither fit, nor unfit, moral, nor immoral in *itself*, but *because* of its circumstances.

To instance in the case of *Abraham*, required to sacrifice his son. The killing of a man is neither good nor bad, considered *absolutely* in *itself*. It was unlawful for *Abraham* to kill his son, because of the *circumstances* he was in with regard to his son. But when the divine command was given, *Abraham* was in a *new state*, the action had *new circumstances*, and then it was as lawful for *Abraham* to kill his son, as it was lawful for God to require any man's life, either by *sickness*, or any *other means* he should please to appoint.

And it had been as unlawful for *Abraham* to have disobeyed God in this extraordinary command, as to have cursed God at any *ordinary calamity* of providence.

Again, it is objected, *If there is nothing right or wrong, good or bad, antecedently and independently of the will of God, there can then be no reason, why God should will, or command one thing, rather than another.*

It is answered, *first*, That all goodness, and all possible perfection, is as *eternal* as God,

and as essential to him as his existence. And to say, that they are either *antecedent* or *consequent*, *dependent* or *independent* of his will, would be equally absurd. To ask therefore, whether there is not something right and wrong, antecedent to the will of God, to render his will *capable* of being right, is as absurd, as to ask for some antecedent cause of his existence, that he may be proved to exist necessarily. And to ask, how God can be good if there is not something good independently of him, is asking how he can be infinite, if there be not something infinite independently of him. And to seek for any other *source* or *reason* of the divine goodness, besides the divine nature, is like seeking for some external cause and help of the divine omnipotence.

The goodness and wisdom, therefore, by which God is wise and good, and to which all his works of wisdom and goodness are owing, are neither *antecedent*, nor *consequent* to his will.

Secondly, Nothing is more certain, than that all *moral obligations* and *duties* of creatures towards one another, *began* with the existence of moral creatures. This is as certain, as that all *physical relations*, and corporeal qualities and effects, *began* with the existence of bodies.

As therefore nothing has the nature of a cause or effect, nothing has any quality of any kind in bodies, but what is entirely owing to matter so created and constituted by the

the *will* of God; so it is equally certain, that no actions have any *moral qualities*, but what are wholly owing to that state and nature in which they are created by the will of God.

Moral obligations therefore of creatures have the same *origin*, and the *same reason*, that natural qualities and effects have in the corporeal world, *viz.* the sole will of God. And as in a different state of matter, bodies would have had different qualities and effects; so in a different state of rational beings, there would be different moral obligations, and nothing could be right or good in their behaviour, but what began then to be right and good, because they then began to exist in such a state and condition of life. And as their state and condition could have no other cause or reason of its existence, but the sole will of God, so the cause and reason of right and wrong in such a state, must be equally owing to the will of God.

The pretended *absolute independent fitnesses*, or *unfitnesses* of actions therefore *in themselves*, are vain *abstractions*, and philosophical *jargon*, serving no ends of morality, but only helping people to wrangle and dispute away that sincere obedience to God, which is their only happiness. But to make these imaginary *absolute fitnesses* the *common law* both of God and man, is still more extravagant. For if the *circumstances* of actions give them their *moral nature*, surely God must first be in our circumstances,

cumstances, before that which is a law to us, can be the same law to him.

And if a father may require that of a son, which his son, because of his *different state*, cannot require of his brother; surely that which God may require of us, may be as different from that, which a father may require of a son, as God is different from a father.

Thus this writer speaking of the law founded on absolute fitnesses, says, *It is a law by which God governs his own actions, and expects that all the rational world should govern theirs**. And lest you should think that God is not in the same state of necessary subjection and obedience to this law, he farther adds, *that God cannot dispense, either with his creatures, or himself, for not observing it †.*

Now to say, that the *reason* of things is the same law to God that it is to us, is saying, that God is in the *same state* with *regard* to the nature of things, as we are. For as things are a law to us, because we are in *such* a state; if they are the *same law* to God, it must be because God is in the same state that we are.

Again, if God is as much under a law as we are, then he is as much under authority; for law can no more be without authority, than without a law-giver. And if God and we are under the *same law*, we must be under the *same authority*.

But as God cannot be under any law in common with us his creatures, any more than he

he can be of the same rank or order with us ; so neither can he be under any law at all, any more than he can be under any authority at all.

For that which is the *rule*, or *reason* of God's actions, is no more different from his own will, than his power is different from his will.

And though God is not to be looked upon as an *arbitrary being*, in the sense of this author, who will not distinguish arbitrary from *humour* and *caprice* ; yet in a better, and only true sense of the word, when applied to God, he must be affirmed to be an arbitrary being, that acts only from himself, from his *own will*, and according to his *own pleasure*.

And we have no more reason to be afraid to be left to a God without a law, than to a God that had no beginning ; or to be left to his will and pleasure, than to be left under the protection and care of a being, that is all love, and mercy, and goodness. For as the existence of God, as such, necessarily implies the existence of all perfection ; so the will of God, as such, necessarily implies the *willing* every thing, that *all perfection* can will.

And as the existence of God, because it contains all perfection, cannot for that reason have any external cause ; so the will of God, because it is *all perfection*, cannot, for that reason, have any external *rule* or *direction*. But his own will is wisdom, and his wisdom is his will.

will. His goodness is arbitrary, and his arbitrariness is goodness.

To bring God therefore into a state of moral obligation and subjection to any external *law* or *rule*, as we are, has all the absurdity of supposing him to be a finite, dependent, temporary, imperfect, improveable, governable being as we are.

But this writer does not only thus bring God into this state of law and obligation with us, but makes farther advances in the same kind of errors.

*Hence, says he, we may contemplate the great dignity of our rational nature, since our reason for kind, though not for degree, is of the same nature with that of God's**.

Here you see *our reason*, that is, our *faculty* of reasoning, for reason cannot be called *ours* in any other respect, has no other difference from reason as it is in God, but that of degree. But what greater absurdity can a man fall into, than to suppose, that a being whose existence had a beginning but a few years ago, differs only in degree from that which could not possibly have a beginning; or that a *dependent* and *independent* being, should not be different in *kind*, but *only* in degree. For if nothing that had a beginning, can be without a beginning; if nothing that is dependent can be independent, then no faculties or powers of dependent beings that began to be, can be of the *same kind*

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kind with the powers of that independent being, that could not begin to be.

For to say, that the faculties of a dependent and independent being, may be of the same kind, is as flat a contradiction, as to say, the same kind of thing may be dependent, and independent, as it is the same kind of thing.

How extravagant would he be, who should affirm, *existence, life, happiness, and power*, to be of the same *kind* and *nature* in us, as they are in God, and only to differ in degree?

And yet it would be more extravagant to suppose, that though God cannot possibly have our *kind* of *existence, life, happiness, and power*, yet he must have our *kind* of reason.

Reason belongs to God and man, just as *power, existence, life, and happiness*, belong to God and man. And he that can from happiness being common to God and man, prove our happiness to be of the *same kind* and nature with God's, may also prove reason in God and man to be of the same kind.

This writer indeed says, *Our happiness is limited, because our reason is so; and that God has unlimited happiness, because he alone has unlimited reason* *.

But if that which is *necessarily limited*, is certainly different from that which is *necessarily unlimited*, then we have proof enough from this very argument, that a reason *necessarily*

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ceſſarily limited, cannot be of the *ſame kind* with that reaſon, which is *neceſſarily* unlimit-
ed. Unless it can be ſaid, that neceſſary and
unneceſſary, limited and unlimited, finite and
infinite, beginning and unbegiſting, have no
contrariety in *kind*, but only differ, as a *ſhort*
line diſfers from a *long* one.

The truth of the matter is this; reaſon is in
God and man, as power is in God and man.
And as the divine power has ſome degree of
likeneſs to human power, yet with an *infinite*
diſference from it; ſo that perfeſion which
we call *reaſon* in God, has ſome degree of like-
neſs to reaſon as it is in man, yet is *infinitely*
and beyond all con cep tion diſferent from it.

Nor can any one ſhew, that we enjoy reaſon
in a *higher degree* in reſpect of God, than we
enjoy power; or that the *manner*, or *light* of
our reaſon, bears any greater likeneſs to the
light and knowledge of God, than the *manner*
and *extent* of our power bears to the omnipo-
tence of God.

And as our enjoyment of power is ſo limited,
ſo imperfect, ſo ſuperficial, as to be scarce ſuf-
ficient to tell us, what power is, much leſs
what omnipotence is; ſo our ſhare of reaſon is
ſo ſmall, and we enjoy it in ſo imperfect a
manner, that we can scarce think or talk intelli-
gibly of it, or ſo muſh as define our own fa-
culties of reasoning.



C H A P. II.

Shewing from the state and relation between God and man, that human reason cannot possibly be a competent judge of the fitness and reasonableness of God's proceedings with mankind, either as to the time, or matter, or manner of any external revelation.

AS our author has laid it down as an undeniable rule of God's actions, that he must, if he be a wise and good being, act according to the relation he stands in towards his creatures ; so I proceed upon this principle, to prove the incapacity of *human reason*, to judge *truly* of God's proceedings in regard to divine revelation.

For if the fitness of actions *results from the nature and relations* of beings, then the fitness of God's actions, as he is an *omniscient creator and governor*, to whom every thing is *eternally foreknown*, over beings endued with *our freedom of will*, must be to us very incomprehensible.

We

We are not so much as capable of comprehending by our own reason the *possibility* of this relation, or how the foreknowledge of God can consist with the free agency of creatures. We know that God foreknows all things, with the same certainty as we know there is a God. And if *self-consciousness* is an infallible proof of our own existence, it proves with the same certainty the freedom of our will. And hence it is, that we have a full assurance of the consistency of God's foreknowledge with freedom of will.

Now this *incomprehensible* relation between an *eternally foreknowing creator* and *governor*, and his free creatures, is the *relation* from whence arises the *fitness* of God's providence over us. But if the *relation* itself is incomprehensible, then those actions that have their *fitness* from it, must surely be incomprehensible. Nothing can be fit for God to do, either in *Creation* or *Providence*, but what has its fitness founded in his own *fore-knowledge* of every thing that would follow, from *every kind* of creation, and *every manner* of providence : But if nothing can be fit, but because it is according to *this fore-knowledge* of *every thing* that would follow from *every kind* of creation, and *every manner* of providence ; then we have the utmost certainty, that the *fitness* of God's actions as a *fore-knowing Creator*, and *Governor* of free agents, must be founded upon *reasons* that we cannot *possibly* know any thing of.

And

And a *child* that has but just learned to speak, is as well qualified to state the fitness of the laws of *matter* and *motion* by which the whole *vegetable* world is preserved, as the wisest of men is qualified to comprehend, or state the fitness of the methods, or proceedings, which a *fore-knowing providence* observes over free agents. For every reason on which the fitness of such a providence is founded, is not only *unknown* to us, but by a necessity of nature *impossible* to be known by us.

For if the *fitness* of God's acting in this, or that manner, is founded in his *fore-knowledge* of every thing that would *happen*, from *every possible way* of acting, then it is just as absolutely impossible for us to know the reasons, on which the fitness of his actions are founded, as it is impossible for us to be omniscient.

What human reason can tell, what kind of beings it is *fit* and *reasonable* for God to create, on the account of his own *eternal fore-knowledge*? And yet this is as possible, as for the same reason to tell, how God ought to govern beings already created, on the account of his own *eternal fore-knowledge*; and yet God can neither *create*, nor *govern* his creatures, as it is *fit* and *reasonable* he should, unless he creates and governs them in *this* or *that* manner, on the *account* of his own *fore-knowledge*. And therefore, if he acts *like* himself, and *worthy* of his own nature, the fitness of his proceedings must for this very reason, be-

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cause they are fit, be vastly above our comprehension.

Who can tell what *different kinds* of rational creatures, distinguished by variety of natures, and faculties, it is fit and reasonable for God to create, because he *eternally foresaw* what would be the *effect* of such different creations? Who can explain the *fitness* of that vast *variety* there is amongst rational creatures of the *same species*, in their rational faculties, or shew that all their different faculties ought to be as they are? And yet the *fitness* of this providence has its *certain reason* in the divine fore-knowledge, and it could not be fit, but because of it.

Who can tell what *degree* of reason rational creatures ought to enjoy, *because* they are rational; or what degrees of *new* and *revealed* knowledge it is fit and reasonable for God to give, or not give them, because they seem, or seem not to themselves to want it, are disposed, or not disposed to receive it? For as mankind cannot tell why it was *fit* and *reasonable* for God to create them of such a *kind*, and *degree*, as they are of; so neither can they tell how God ought, or ought not to add to their natural knowledge, and make them as *differently accountable* for the use of revealed rules of life, as for the use of their natural faculties.

And as the reason why God created them of *such a kind*, and with *such faculties*, was because of his own fore-knowledge of the *effects* of

of such a creation; so if ever he does reveal to them any *supernatural* knowledge, both the doing it, the *time*, and *matter* and *manner* of it, must have their *fitness* in his own *eternal fore-knowledge* of the effects of such a revelation.

The reasons therefore on which the *fitness* of this or that revelation, *why* or *when*, of *what matter*, in *what manner*, and to *whom* it is to be made, must, from the nature and reason of things, be as unsearchable by us, as the reasons of *this* or *that* creation of rational beings, at such a *time*, of such a *kind*, in such a *manner*, and in such a *state*.

This may help us to an easy solution of those unreasonable questions, which this writer puts in this manner.

If the design of God in communicating any thing of himself to men was their happiness, would not that design have obliged him, who at all times alike desires their happiness, to have at all times alike communicated it to them? If God always acts for the good of his creatures, what reason can be assigned, why he should not from the beginning have discovered such things as make for their good, but defer the doing it till the time of Tiberius; since the sooner this was done, the greater would his goodness appear?

And again, *How is it consistent with the notion of God's being universally benevolent, not to have revealed it to all his children, when all*

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* Page 393.

had equal need of it? Was it not as easy for him to have communicated it to all nations, as to any one nation or person? Or in all languages, as in one +?

Now all this is fully answered, by our author's own great and fundamental principle.

For if the relations between things and persons, and the fitness resulting from thence, be the sole rule of God's actions ||, as he expressly affirms; then the sole rule or reason of God's revealing any thing to any man, or men, at any time, must have its fitness resulting from the divine fore-knowledge of the effects of such a revelation, at such a time, and to such persons. If God does not act thus, he does not act according to the relation betwixt a fore-knowing Creator, and his free creatures. But if he does act according to a fitness resulting from this relation, and makes, or does not make revelations, according to his own fore-knowledge of the fitness of times, and persons for them; then to ask how a God, always equally good, can make a revelation at any time, and not make the same at all times, is as absurd as to ask, how a God, always equally good, can reveal that at one time, because it is a proper time for it, and not reveal it at every other time, though every other time is improper for it.

God's goodness, directed by his own fore-knowledge of the fitness of times, and of the state and actions of free agents, deferred a certain

tain revelation to the time of *Tiberius*, because he *foresaw* it would then be an act of the *greatest* goodness, and have its *best effects* upon the world : To ask therefore, *what reason can be assigned*, why so good and beneficial a revelation was not *sooner*, or even from the *beginning* made to the world, is asking, *What reason can be assigned*, why God is good, and intends the *greatest* good by what he does, or stays for the doing any thing, till such time, as makes it a greater good than if he had done it sooner ; it is asking, *why God should act*, according to his *own fore-knowledge* of the *state* and *actions* of *free agents*, and order all things, according to a fitness resulting from such a fore-knowledge.

These questions suppose, that if God shewed his *goodness* to mankind by a revelation at such time, he must be *wanting* in goodness before that time, because he did not make it *sooner* ; whereas if his deferring it till *such* a time, was owing to his *fore-knowledge* of the actions and and state of free agents, and of the *effects* of his revelation, and because it would then have its *best effects*, then God is proved to be *equally* good before he made it, for this very reason, because he did not make it before its *proper* time ; and he had been wanting in goodness, if he had not *deferred* it till that time.

Now this appealing to God's fore-knowledge of the state and actions of *free agents*, as the cause of all that is particular in the *time* and *manner* of any revelation, and deducing its

fitness from thence, cannot be said to be *beginning the question* in dispute, but is resolving it directly according to the *rule*, which this writer lays down for God to act by, which is this : *That the relations between things and persons, and the fitness resulting from thence, must be the sole rule of God's actions, unless he be an arbitrary being.*

But if this is the *sole rule*, then God in giving any revelation, must act as the *relation* betwixt a *fore-knowing Creator* and his *free creatures* requires ; and his actions must have their *fitness resulting* from his fore-knowledge of the *state* and *actions* of free agents. And if this is God's sole rule, made necessary to him from the nature of things, then to ask why *this* or *that* revelation *only* at *such* a time, is to ask why God *only* does that which is *fit* for him to do. And to ask, why not the same revelation at any other time, is asking why God does not do that, which it is *not fit* for him to do.

This writer asks, *How it is consistent with the notion of God's being universally benevolent, not to have revealed it to all his children, who had equal need of it?* But if they had *equal need* of it, yet if they were not *equally fit* for it, but prepared only to have their *guilt increased* by it, and so be exposed to a greater damnation by refusing it ; then God's goodness to them is very manifest, by with-holding such information from them, and reserving it for those that would be made happier by it.

Judas

Judas and *Pontius Pilate*, and the *Jews* that called for our Saviour's crucifixion, had equal need of a Saviour with those that believed in him. *Chorazin* and *Bethsaida* wanted the light of the Gospel as much as those that received it; but if the rest of the world had been, at that time, as much indisposed for the light of the Gospel, as they were, God's goodness had been greater to that age, if he had left them as they were, and reserved the light of the Gospel till a better age had succeeded.

So that this argument, founded on the *equal need* of all, or former ages, has no force, unless it could be shewn, that the same revelation made to any of these former ages, would have produced all those good effects, which God foresaw would follow, from its being reserved for such a *particular time* and *state* of things and persons.

He asks again, *Was it not as easy for God to have communicated it to all nations, as to any one nation or person? Or in all languages, as in any one?* This argument is built upon the *truth* and *reasonableness* of this supposition, That God does things because they are *easy*, or forbears things because they are *difficult* to be performed. For it can be no argument, that God ought to have revealed such things to *all* nations or persons, because it was as *easy* to him, as to do it to *any one* nation or person; unless it be supposed, that the *easiness* of a thing is a reason why God does it, and the *difficulty* of a thing a reason why he does not do it. But

if this supposition be very absurd, then the argument founded upon it must be liable to the same charge.

But if God does things, not because they are easy, but because they are infinitely good and fit to be done, and founded in the *relation* of a fore-knowing Creator to his free creatures; then the reason why God has afforded different revelations, to different ages and persons, is this, That his *manner* of revealing every thing, might be *worthy* of his own *fore-knowledge* of the effects of it, and that every thing that is particular in the *time* or *manner* of any revelation, might have its *fitness resulting* from the *relation* betwixt a good God and his creatures, whose *changing state, different conduct, tempers and actions*, are all eternally fore-known by him.

If it should here be said, that this writer only means, that it is as *possible* for God to make the same revelation have the *same* effects, and produce *as much* good in one age as in another;

This is only saying, It is as *possible* for God to *destroy* the difference of times and *states*, to *over-rule* the nature of things, and turn all mankind into *mere machines*, as it is to govern and preside over them according to their natures. For if the natures of things are not to be destroyed; if the *nature, and state, and tempers* of men, and the *freedom* of their wills, are to be suffered to act according to themselves; then to say, it is as *possible* for God to make the

the same revelation to have the same effect in one age as in another, is as absurd as to say, it is as possible for him to make the *same heat* of the *Sun*, have the same effects upon any one place of the earth, that it has upon another, upon *rocks* and *barren sands*, as it has upon a fertile soil, without altering the nature of *rocks* and *sands*.

Again, it is objected, that a divine revelation must either be the effect of *justice*, or else of *mercy* and *free goodness*; but in either of these cases it ought to be *universal*; for justice must be done to all. But if it is the effect of *mercy* and *free goodness*, this writer asks, *How a being can be denominated merciful and good, who is so only to a few, but cruel and unmerciful to the rest* *?

It is answered, That there is neither *justice* in God without *mercy*, nor *mercy* without *justice*; and to ascribe a *revelation* to either of them separately, - in *contradistinction* to the other, has no more truth or reason in it, than to ascribe the *creation* separately either to the *Wisdom*, or *Power* of God, in *contradistinction* to the other.

Secondly, A divine revelation is not owing to the *justice* or *free goodness* of God, either *separately* or *jointly* considered; but to the *goodness*, *mercy*, and *justice* of God, *governed* and *directed* by his eternal fore-knowledge of all

* *Page 401.*

all the effects of every revelation, at any, or all times.

God ordains a revelation in this, or that manner, time, and place ; not because it is a *justice* that he cannot refuse, not because it is matter of *favour* or *free* goodness, and therefore may be given in any manner at pleasure; but because he has the whole *duration* of human things, the whole *race* of mankind, the whole *order* of human changes and events, the whole *combination* of all causes and effects of human tempers, all the *actions* of free agents, and *all the consequences* of every revelation, plainly in his sight ; and according to this eternal fore-knowledge, every revelation receives every thing that is *particular* in it, either as to *time*, *matter*, *manner*, or *place*.

He shews his goodness in a revelation to *this part* of the world, not because it is a *part* that *alone* wants it, not because he can bestow his *favours* as he pleases, but because by acting *so* with *such* a part, he *best* shews his goodness and regard to the *whole*. He reveals himself at *such a time*, not because he at *that time* begins to have a *partial* or *particular* *kindness*, but because by so *timing* his goodness, he *best* shews his care and goodness throughout the *whole duration* of human things, from the beginning to the end of the world. And it is because he had the *same good will* towards mankind in *every age*, that he does what he does in any *particular* age.

And

And if by the *particular* time and manner of any revelation, the *whole race* of mankind receive more benefit from it; if more are raised to happiness by it, and fewer are made miserable by a blameable *using* or *refusing* it, than could have happened by *any other* time, or manner of giving it to the World, consistent with the natural freedom of men; then God, by being particular in the time and place of giving it, is not merciful to a *few*, and cruel to *many*, but is *most* merciful to *all*; because he only chose *such time*, and *place*, and *persons*, because *all* would receive more benefit from it, than they possibly could from the choice of any other time, or place, or persons.

All complaints therefore about that which is *particular*, or *seemingly* partial in the time and manner of any revelation, are very unjustifiable; and shew, that we are discontent at God's proceedings, because he acts like himself, does what is *best* and *fittest* to be done, and governs the world, not according to our weak imaginations, but according to his own infinite perfections.

We will not allow a Providence to be *right*, unless we can comprehend and explain the reasonableness of all its steps; and yet it could not *possibly* be right, unless its proceedings were as much *above* our comprehension, as our wisdom is *below* that which is infinite.

For if the *relations* of *things* and *persons*, and the *fitness* resulting from thence, be the *rule* of
God's

God's actions; then all the revelations that come from God, must have their *fitness* resulting from the relation his fore-knowledge bears to the *various states, conditions, tempers, and actions* of free agents, and the *various effects* of every manner of revelation.

But if God cannot act worthy of himself in any manner of revelation, unless he acts according to a fitness resulting from this relation; then we have the highest certainty, that he must act by a *rule* that lies out of our sight, and that his Providence in this particular must be incomprehensible to us; for this very reason, because it has that very fitness, wisdom and goodness in it, that it ought to have.



C H A P. III.

Shewing how far human reason is enabled to judge of the reasonableness, truth and certainty of divine Revelation.

THE former chapter has plainly shewn, from the state and relation between God and man, that we must be strangers to the true reasons on which a divine revelation is

is founded, both as to its time, matter, and manner.

But it is here objected, *If God by reason of his own perfections must be thus mysterious and incomprehensible, both in the matter and manner of divine revelation; How can we know what revelations we are to receive as divine? How can we be blamed for rejecting this, or receiving that, if we cannot comprehend the reasons on which every revelation is founded, both as to its matter and manner?*

Just as we may be blamed for some notions of God, and commended for others, though we can have no notions of God, but such as are mysterious and inconceivable. We are not without some natural capacity of judging right of God, of finding out his perfections, and proving what is, or is not worthy to be ascribed to him. Yet what the divine perfections are in themselves, what they imply and contain in their own nature and manner of existence, is altogether mysterious and inconceivable by us at present. If therefore a man may be blameable, or commendable, for his right or wrong belief of a God; then a man may be accountable for a right or wrong belief of such matters, as are in their own nature too mysterious for his comprehension. And though a man knows the reasons of a divine revelation, either as to its matter or manner; as imperfectly as he knows the divine nature; yet he may be as liable to account for believing *false revelations*, as for *idolatry*; and as full of guilt for reject-

ing a *true revelation*, as for denying the only true God.

Secondly, Though we are insufficient for comprehending the *reasons*, on which the particular *matter* or *manner* of any divine revelation is founded; yet we may be so far sufficient judges, of the *reasons* for receiving or not receiving a revelation as divine, as to make our conduct therein justly accountable to God.

For if God can shew a revelation to proceed from him, by the *same undeniable* evidence, as he shews the *creation* to be his *work*; if he can make himself as visible in a *particular extraordinary* manner, as he is by his *general* and *ordinary* providence; then, though we are as unqualified to judge of the mysteries of a *revelation*, as we are to judge of the mysteries in *creation* and *providence*; yet we may be as fully obliged to receive a revelation, as to acknowledge the creation to be the work of God; and as highly criminal for disbelieving it, as for denying a general Providence.

Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses, were very incompetent judges, of the reasons on which the particular revelations made to them were founded; but this did not hinder their sufficient assurance, that such revelations came from God, because they were proved to come from God in the same manner, and for the same reasons, as the creation is proved to be the Work of God.

And

And as *Adam* and *Noah* must see every thing wonderful, mysterious, and above their comprehensions, in those new worlds into which they were introduced by God ; so they could no more expect, that he should require nothing of them, but what they would enjoin themselves, than that their own *frame*, the *nature* of the creation, the *providence* of God, or the *state* of human life, should be exactly as they would have it.

And if their posterity will let no *messages* from heaven, no *prophecies* and *miracles* persuade them, that God can call them to any duties, but such they must enjoin themselves ; or to the belief of any doctrines, but such as their own minds can suggest; nor to any methods of changing their present state of weakness and disorder for a happy immortality, but such as suit their own *taste*, *temper*, and way of reasoning ; it is because they are grown senseless of the mysteries of creation and providence with which they are surrounded, and forget the awful prerogative of infinite wisdom, over the weakest, lowest rank of intelligent beings.

For the *excellence* of a revelation is to be acknowledged by us, for the same reason that we are to acknowledge the excellence of creation and providence ; not because they are wholly according to human conception, and have no mysteries, but because they are proved to be of God.

And

And a revelation is to be received as coming from God, not because of its internal excellence, or because we judge it to be worthy of God; but because God has declared it to be his, in as *plain* and *undeniable* a manner, as he has declared *creation* and *providence* to be his.

For though no revelation can come from God, but what is truly worthy of him, and full of every internal excellence; yet what is truly worthy of God to be *revealed*, cannot possibly be known by us, but by a revelation from himself.

And as we can only know what is worthy of God in creation, by knowing what he has created; so we can no other way possibly know what is worthy of God to be revealed, but by a revelation. And he that pretends, independently of any revelation, to shew how, and in what manner God ought to make a revelation worthy of himself, is as great a *Visionary*, as he that should pretend, independently of the creation, or without learning any thing from it, to shew how God ought to have proceeded in it, to make it worthy of himself. For as God alone, knows how to create worthy of himself, and nothing can possibly be proved to be worthy to be created by him, but because he has already created it; so God alone knows what is worthy of himself in a revelation, and nothing can possibly be proved worthy to be revealed by him; but because he has already revealed it.

Hence

Hence we may see how little this writer is governed by the *reason* and *nature* of things, who proceeds upon this as an undeniably principle, that we could not know a revelation to be divine, unless we knew, antecedently to revelation, what God could teach or require of us by it. Thus, says he, *Were we not capable by our reason of knowing what the divine goodness could command, or forbid his creatures, antecedently to any external revelation, we could not distinguish the true instituted religion from the many false ones**.

Just as *wild* and *visionary*, as if it was said, *Were we not capable by our reason of knowing what kind or order of beings God ought to create, independently of any thing we learn from the creation, we could never prove this or that creation to proceed from him.* Did we not, antecedently to facts and experience, know by our own reason what ought to be the method and manner of divine providence, we could never prove that the providence which governs nations and persons is a divine providence.

For if a revelation could have no proof that it was divine, unless we by our reason, *antecedently to all* revelation, knew *all* that *any* revelation could contain, or require of us; then it undeniably follows, that no *providence* or *creation* could be proved to be divine, unless we by our reason, *independently* of creation and providence, could tell what *kind* of beings

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God ought to create, or what *manner* of providence he ought to observe.

For that which cannot be ascribed to God in revelation, because it is unworthy of his wisdom and goodness, cannot be ascribed to God in creation and providence.

Again, He proceeds to shew, that a revelation from God cannot contain any thing, but what human reason can prove from the nature of things; for this reason, because if God could require any thing more of us, than what our own reason could thus prove, he must then require *without* reason, be an *arbitrary* being, and then there is an end of all religion.

Now this argument proceeds thus; If God does not act according to the *measure* of *human* reason, he cannot act according to *reason itself*. If he requires any thing more of us, than what we *think* the nature of things requires of us, then he cannot act according to the nature of things. If he makes any thing a rule or law to us, which we would not impose upon ourselves, then he must make laws by *mere will*, without any reason for them. If he requires us to believe any thing of his own nature, or our nature, more than we could have known of ourselves, then he must act by *caprice* and *humour*, and be an arbitrary being. If his *infinite* wisdom is in any matters of revelation greater than ours; if it is not in every thing he reveals *measurable* by ours, it cannot be wisdom

wisdom at all, much less can it be infinite wisdom.

That is, if he is *more powerful* than we are, he cannot be *omnipotent*; if he is *more perfect* than we are, he cannot be *all perfection*; if he acts upon *greater*, or *higher*, or *more reasonable* motives than we do, he cannot be a *reasonable* being.

Now if these absurdities are not plain and manifest to every common understanding, it is in vain to dispute about any thing; but if they are, then it is as plain, this writer's great argument against Christianity, and first principle of his *rational religion*, is in the same state of undeniable absurdity, as being solely built upon them.

Thus, says he, *Natural religion takes in all those duties which flow from the reason and the nature of things**. That is, natural religion takes in all those things that bare human reason can of itself discover from the nature of things. This is granted; but what follows? Why, says he, *Consequently, was there an instituted religion which differs from that of nature, its precepts must be arbitrary, as not founded on the nature and reason of things, but depending on mere will and pleasure, otherwise it would be the same with natural religion* †.

That is, since natural religion contains all that bare human reason can of itself discover, if God was to reveal any thing more than hu-

man reason can discover, he must be an arbitrary being, and act by mere will and pleasure; otherwise his revelation would be the same with, and nothing more than human reason.

Here you see all the absurdities just mentioned, are expressly contained in this argument, God is all *humour, caprice, and mere arbitrary will*, if his revelation is not strictly, in every respect, the same with human reason. That is, he is *without wisdom, without reason*, if his wisdom and reason exceed ours. He has *no reason, nor wisdom*, if his reason and wisdom are *infinite*.

Secondly, This argument, if it were allowed, leads directly to *atheism*. For if a revelation cannot be divine, if it contains any thing mysterious, whose fitness and necessity cannot be explained by human reason, then neither *creation* nor *providence* can be proved to be divine, for they are both of them more mysterious than the Christian revelation. And revelation itself is *therefore* mysterious, because creation and providence cannot be delivered from mystery. And was it possible for man to comprehend the reasons, on which the *manner* of the creation and divine providence are founded, then revelation might be without mysteries.

But if the mysteries in revelation are owing to that, which is by the nature of things incomprehensible in creation and providence,
then

then it is very unreasonable to reject revelation, because it has that which it must necessarily have, not from itself, but from the nature and state of things. And much worse is it, to deny revelation to be divine, for such a reason, as makes it equally fit to deny *creation* and *providence* to be of God.

For if every thing is *arbitrary*, whose *fitness and expedience* human reason cannot *prove* and *explain*, then surely an *invisible over-ruling providence*, that orders all things in a manner, and for reasons, known only to itself; that subjects human life, and human affairs, to what changes it pleases; that confounds the best laid designs, and makes great effects arise from folly and imprudence; that gives the race not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; that brings good men into affliction, and makes the wicked prosperous; surely such a providence must be highly arbitrary.

And therefore if this argument is to be admitted, it leads directly to *atheism*, and brings us under a greater necessity of rejecting this notion of divine providence, on the account of its mysteries, than of rejecting a revelation that is mysterious in any of its doctrines. And if, as this writer frequently argues, God cannot be said to deal with us as rational agents, if he requires any thing of us, that our reason cannot prove to be necessary; surely he cannot be said to deal with us as rational and moral agents, if he over-rules our persons and affairs, and disappoints our counsels, makes

weakness prosperous, and wisdom unsuccessful, in a *secret* and *invisible* manner, and for reasons and ends that we have no means of knowing.

And if it may be said, To what purpose has he given us reason, if that is not solely to give laws to us; surely it may better be said, To what purpose has he given us reason to take care of ourselves, to provide for our happiness, to prepare *proper* means for certain ends, if there is an over-ruling providence that changes the *natural course* of things, that confounds the best laid designs, and disappoints the wisest counsels?

There is nothing therefore half so mysterious in the Christian revelation, considered in itself, as there is in that *invisible* providence, which all must hold that believe a God. And though there is enough plain in providence, to excite the adoration of humble and pious minds, yet it has often been a rock of *atheism* to those, who make their own reason the measure of wisdom.

Again, Though the *creation* plainly declares the glory, and wisdom, and goodness of God; yet it has more mysteries in it, more things whose fitness, expedience, and reasonableness, human reason cannot comprehend, than are to be found in Scripture.

If therefore he reasons right, who says, *If there may be some things in a true Religion, whose fitness and expedience we cannot see, why not others: Nay, why not the whole; since that*

that would make God's laws all of a piece? And if the having of these things is no proof of its falsehood, how can any things fit and expedient (which no Religion is without) be a proof of the truth of any one Religion*? If, I say, this is right reasoning, then it may be said, *If there are things in the creation whose fitness we cannot see, why not others:* Nay, why not the whole; since that would make all God's works of a piece? And if the being of such things as these in the creation, is not a proof of its not being divine, How can the fitness and expedience of any creation prove that it is the work of God?

Thus does this argument tend wholly to Atheism, and concludes with the same force against *creation* and *providence*, as it does against *revelation*.

This is farther plain from our author's account of the *works* and *laws* of God. It is a first principle with him, that God's *laws* and *works* must have the same infinite wisdom in them. *That they both alike have the character of infinite wisdom impressed on them, and both alike discover their divine original* †.

But if so, then nothing can prove any *works* to be of divine original, but that which will prove any *laws* to be of divine original. And nothing can shew any *laws* to be unworthy of God, but what would equally shew any *works* to be unworthy of God. But we have already

* *First Address to the Inhabitants of London, page 57.*

† *Page 124.*

seen, that no laws can come from God, or be fit for him to make, but such as human reason can prove to be fit and expedient; therefore *no works* can proceed from God, or be worthy of him, but such as human reason can prove to be fit and expedient.

Either therefore there is nothing in the works of the creation, whose fitness and expedience cannot be proved; nothing in God's providence over whole nations, and particular persons, whose fitness and expedience cannot be explained and justified by human reason, or else neither creation nor providence can be ascribed to God.

He says, *It is impossible men should have any just idea of the perfections of God, who think that the dictates of infinite Wisdom, do not carry their own evidence with them, or are not by their own innate worth discoverable to all mankind* *.

But if so, then we are obliged, out of regard to the divine perfections, to deny every creature, or part of the creation, to proceed from God, which does not carry its own evidence of infinite wisdom, and discover its own innate worth to all mankind.

Any one must easily see, that I put no force upon this writer's arguments, to give them this atheistical tendency, but barely represent them as they are in his book.

For since it is his own avowed and repeated principle, that God's *works* and *laws* are both
of

* Page 125.

of a kind, and that they must both *alike discover their divine original*; it necessarily follows, that if any *law* or *command* must be unfit for God to make, because its fitness cannot be proved by human reason; then every creature, or part of the creation, whose fitness and expedience cannot be proved by human reason, must be rejected as unworthy of God. So that this argument leads to Atheism, not by any remote consequence, but by its first and immediate tendency.

For according to it, a man is obliged, out of regard to the divine perfections, to deal with *creation* and *providence*, as this writer does with *Scripture*; and to allow no more of either of them, than suits with his own notions of that which God ought to do in creation and providence.

The true grounds and reasons on which we are to believe a revelation to be divine, are such external marks and signs of God's action and operation, as are a sufficient proof of it. And if God has no ways of acting that are peculiar and particular to himself, and such as sufficiently prove his action and operation, then revelation can have no sufficient proof that it comes from God.

And if a revelation had no other proof of its Divinity, but such an internal excellency and fitness of its doctrines, as is fully known and approved of by *human reason*; such an internal excellency would be so far from being a sufficient proof of its Divinity, that it would
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be a probable objection against it. For it has an appearance of great probability, that God would not make an external revelation of that *only*, which was *sufficiently* and fully known to the natural man, or mere Reason, without it.

Although therefore no revelation can come from God, whose doctrines have not an *internal excellency*, and the *highest fitness*; yet the non-appearance of such excellency and fitness to *our reason*, cannot be a disproof of its Divinity, because it is our ignorance of such matters without revelation, that is the *true ground and reason* of God's revealing any thing to us.

The credibility therefore of any external divine revelation with regard to human reason, rests wholly upon *such external evidence*, as is a sufficient proof of the divine operation, or interposition. If there be no such external evidence possible; if God has no ways of acting so *peculiar* to himself, as to be a *sufficient proof* to human reason of his action; then no revelation can be sufficiently proved to be a divine, external revelation from God.

I appeal therefore to the miracles and prophecies on which Christianity is founded, as a sufficient proof, that it is a divine revelation. And shall here consider, what is objected against the sufficiency of this kind of proof.

i. It is objected, That miracles cannot prove a *false*, or *bad* doctrine, to be *true* and *good*;

good; therefore miracles, *as such*, cannot prove the truth of any revelation.

But though miracles cannot prove false to be true, or bad to be good ; yet they may prove, that we ought to receive such doctrines, both as true and good, which we could not know to be true and good without such miracles. Not because the miracles have any influence upon the things revealed, but because they testify the credibility of the revealer, as having God's testimony to the truth of that which he reveals.

If therefore miracles can be a sufficient proof, of God's sending any persons to speak in his name, and under his authority ; then they may be a sufficient proof of the truth and divinity of a revelation, though they cannot prove that which is false, to be true.

Our author therefore brings a farther objection against this use of miracles.

If, says he, *evil beings can impress notions in mens minds as strongly as good beings, and cause miracles to be done in confirmation of them* ; *is there any way to know to which of the two, notions thus impressed are owing, but from their nature and tendency, or internal marks of wisdom and goodness ?—And if so, Can external proofs carry us any farther, than the internal proofs do ** ?

This objection supposes, that no miracles, *as such*, can be a sufficient proof of the divinity of a revelation ; for this reason, because we do not

* Page 243.

not know the extent of that power, which evil spirits have, of doing miracles. But this objection is groundless. For, granting that we do not know the nature and extent of that power which evil spirits may have ; yet if we know enough of it to affirm, that the *creation* is not the work of evil spirits ; if we can securely appeal to the creation, as *a sufficient proof* of God's action and operation ; then we are fully secure in appealing to miracles, as a sufficient proof of a divine revelation.

For, if the creation must of necessity be allowed to be the work of God, notwithstanding any *unknown degree* of power in evil spirits ; if we can as certainly ascribe it to God, as if we really knew there were no *such* spirits ; then in some cases, miracles may be as full a proof of the operation, or interposition of God, as if we really knew there were no such spirits in being.

I do not ask, Whether the *same divine perfection* is necessary to foretel such things as are foretold in Scripture, and work such miracles as are there related, as is necessary to *create*? I do not ask, Whether any power less than divine can do such things? I only ask, Whether there is any certainty, that the creation is the work of God ? Whether we can be sure of the divine operation, from the existence of that creation that we are acquainted with? Or, Whether we are in any *doubt* or *uncertainty* about it, because we do not know the *true nature*

nature or degree of power, that may belong to evil spirits?

For if it can be affirmed with certainty, that the creation is the work of God, notwithstanding our uncertainty about the degree of power that may belong to evil spirits; then we have the same certainty, that the *prophecies* and *miracles* recorded in Scripture, are to be ascribed to God, as his doing, notwithstanding our uncertainty of the power of evil spirits.

And this is affirmed, not because *prophecies* and *miracles* require the *same degree* of divine power, as to create, (for that would be affirming we know not what) but it is affirmed, because the creation cannot be a *better*, *farther*, or *different* proof of the action or operation of God, than such *miracles* and *prophecies* are.

For every reason for ascribing the creation to God, is the same reason for ascribing such *miracles* and *prophecies* to God; and every argument against the certainty of those *miracles* and *prophecies* coming from God, is the same argument against the certainty of the creation's being the work of God; for there cannot be more or less certainty in one case than in the other.

For, if evil spirits have so the creation in their hands, that by reason of their power over it, *no miracles* can prove the operation of God, then the operation of God cannot be proved from the creation itself.

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For the creation cannot be proved to be the operation of God, unless it can be proved that God still presides over it.

And if *all that* which is extraordinary and miraculous may be accounted for, without the interposition of God; then nothing that is ordinary and common, according to the course of nature, can be a proof of the action of God. For there can be no reason assigned, why that which is *ordinary* should be ascribed to God, if all that is, or has been, or can be miraculous, may be ascribed to evil spirits.

Either therefore it must be said, that there are, or may be miracles, which cannot be the effects of evil spirits; or else nothing that is ordinary and common, can be a proof of the operation of God. For if nothing miraculous can be an undeniable proof of God's action, nothing created can be a proof of it.

The matter therefore stands thus: There are, and may be miracles, that cannot be ascribed to evil spirits, without ascribing the creation to them; and which can no more be doubted to come from God, than we can doubt of his being the Creator of the world. There may be miracles therefore, which, *as such*, and considered *in themselves*, are as full a proof of the *truth* of that which they attest, as the creation is of the *fitness* of that which is created.

And though the *matter* of a revelation is to be attended to, that we may fully understand it, and be rightly affected with it; yet the reason

son of our receiving it as divine, must rest upon that *external authority*, which shews it to be of God.

And the authority of miracles, sufficiently plain and apparent, are of themselves a full and necessary reason for receiving a revelation, which both as to its *matter* and *manner*, would not be approved by us without them.

It seems therefore to be a *needless*, and too great a concession, which some *learned divines* make in this matter, when they grant, that we must first examine the doctrines revealed by miracles, and see whether they contain any thing in them *absurd*, or *unworthy* of God, before we can receive the miracles as divine. For,

i. Where there can be nothing doubted, nor any more required, to make the miracles sufficiently plain and evident, there can be no doubt about the truth and goodness of the doctrine they attest. Miracles in such a state as this are the last resort, they determine for themselves, and cannot be tried by any thing farther.

And as the *existence* of things, is the highest and utmost evidence of God's having created them, and not to be tried by our *judgments* about the reasonableness and ends of their creation; so a course of plain undeniable miracles, attesting the truth of a revelation, is the highest and *utmost* evidence of its coming from God, and not to be tried by our judgments about

about the *reasonableness* or *necessity* of its doctrines.

— And this is to be affirmed, not because God is too good to suffer us to be brought into such a snare, but because we can know nothing of God, if such a course of miracles is not a sufficient proof of his action and interposition. For if doctrines revealed by such an *undeniable change* in the natural course of things, have not thence a sufficient proof, that they are divine doctrines; then *no laws* that are according to the natural state of things, can have *thence* any proof, that they are *divine laws*.

For if *no course of miracles* can be of *itself* a sufficient proof, that *that* which is attested by them, is attested by God; then no *settled, ordinary* state of things can of *itself* be a proof, that *that* which is required by the natural state of things, is required by God.

2. To try miracles, sufficiently plain and evident, by *our judgments* of the reasonableness of the doctrines revealed by them, seems to be beginning at the wrong end. For the doctrines had not been revealed, but because of our ignorance of the *nature* and *reasonableness* of them; nor had the miracles been wrought, but to prevent our *acquiescing* in our own judgments about the worth and value of them.

3. To say, That no miracles, however plain and evident, are to be received as divine, if they attest any doctrine that appears to *human reason* to be absurd, or unworthy of God, is very unreasonable. For what is it that can be called *human reason* in this respect? Is it any thing else than *human opinion*? And is there any thing that mankind are in greater uncertainty, or more contrary to one another, than in their opinions about what is absurd, or unworthy of God in religion? And is it not the very end and design of a divine revelation, to help us to a rule that may put an end to the divisions of *human reason*, and furnish us with an authority for believing such things, as we should not think it reasonable to believe without it?

And how weak and useless must that revelation be, which has not sufficient authority to teach us *new notions* of religion, and persuade us to believe that to be reasonable and worthy of God, which we could not believe to be so upon a less authority?

But if this be the case, as it seems clearly to be, then we are not to try plain and evident miracles of the *highest kind*, by our judgments of the reasonableness of the doctrines revealed by them; but miracles are to be received, as of sufficient authority, to form and govern our opinions about the reasonableness of the doctrines.

It may perhaps be said, though the authority of miracles, is sufficient to govern our

opinions in doctrines that are only mysterious, and above the comprehension of our reason, yet that which is plainly and grossly absurd, or unworthy of God, cannot, nor ought to be received upon any authority of the *greatest miracles.*

This objection is vain and absurd; it is vain, because it relates to a case that never was the case of miracles; and it is absurd, because it is providing against a case, that never can happen to miracles. For to suppose any thing in its own nature grossly absurd, or unworthy of God, to be attested with the *highest evidence* of miracles, is as impossible, and contradictory a supposition, as to suppose God to create rational beings wicked in their nature, that they might thereby be of service to the devil. These two suppositions have not the smallest difference, either in absurdity, or impossibility.

Again; The history of magical wonders, and extraordinary things done by evil spirits, is no objection against the sufficiency of that proof, that arises from miracles. For the question is not, whether nothing that is extraordinary can be done by evil spirits, in any circumstances, but whether nothing that is miraculous can, *as such*, be a proof of its being done by God. For these two cases are very consistent. It may be very possible for evil spirits, to do things extraordinary in *some circumstances*, as where people enter into contracts with them, and resign themselves up to their power, and yet that miracles may in *other circumstances*, merely as

miracles, be a sufficient proof of their being done by God.

Thus the case of the *Egyptian magicians*, is so far from abating the weight of miracles, that it is a great proof of their authority, considered in themselves ; for the *Magicians* could proceed but a little way in their contention with *Moses*, they were soon made to feel his superior power in the same manner, as the rest of the *Egyptians* did, and to confess, that his miracles were done by the *finger of God*. This very instance therefore fully shews, that miracles, *as such*, may be a sufficient proof of God's interposition. For if, in the case of a contention, the superior power must be ascribed to God, then miracles, *as such*, or of *such a kind*, as having none equal to them, or able to stand against them, must in such a state be a sufficient proof of their being done by God, and give a sufficient warrant, to receive any doctrine that is attested by them.

For, let it be supposed, that the *Egyptian Magicians* had destroyed the power of *Moses*, and brought all the *miraculous evils* upon the *Israelites*, as enemies of the *Egyptian Gods*, which he brought upon them; what consequence must *reason* have drawn from such an event? Could reason have proved, that the God that made the world was *one God*, and that he alone ought to be worshipped? Or that the *Egyptians* ought to have left their Gods, who had the *whole creation* in their hands in such a manner, as to change the nature of

things as they pleased, and destroy every power that opposed them ?

Now either the case here supposed is possible, or it is impossible. If it is possible, then all the reasons for worshipping the *one true God*, taken from the *nature* and *state* of the creation, may entirely cease, and be so many reasons for idolatrous worship. For no one can have any reasons for worshipping the one true God, from the nature and state of the creation, if other Gods have the greatest power over it, and can turn every thing into a *plague* upon those that do not worship them.

But if this case is impossible, then it necessarily follows, that miracles, *as such*, and considered *in themselves*, may be *certain* and *infallible* proofs of God's interposition. For this case can only be impossible, because the greatest, plainest miracles, cannot possibly be on the side of error. But if this cannot be, then the greatest, plainest miracles, *as such*, and considered *in themselves*, are an infallible mark of truth.

And he that abides by miracles in such circumstances, as proofs of the operation of the *one true God*, has the same certainty of proceeding right, as he that takes the state, and nature of the creation, to be the effect of the *one true God*.

And as miracles thus considered in themselves, are the highest and most undeniable evidence of the truth and divinity of any external revelation ; so Christianity stands fully distinguished

stinguished from all other religions, by the highest and most undeniable evidence ; since it has all the proof that the *highest state* of miracles can give, and every other religion is without any support from them.

And though this writer, with a boldness worthy of himself, often puts all *traditional religions* upon a level ; yet he might have shewn himself as much a friend to truth and sobriety, by asserting, that all *arguments* are equally conclusive, all *tempers* equally virtuous, all *designs* equally honest, and all *histories* and *fables* equally supported by evidence of fact.

But his prodigious rashness in asserting, at all adventures, whatever he pleases, is not confined to matters of fact, but is as remarkably visible in that part of his book which pretends to argument ; as may be fully seen by the following paragraphs.

" It is the observation, says he, of *naturalists*, that there is no species of creatures, " but what have some *innate weakness*, which " makes them an easy prey to other animals " that know how to make the advantage of " it. Now the *peculiar foible* of mankind " is *superstition*, which at all times has made " them liable to be practised on, not by crea- " tures of different species, but by those of " their own ; who by a confident pretence of " knowing more than their neighbours, have " first circumvented the *many*, the *credulous*, " and *unwary* ; and afterwards forced the

" free-thinking few into an outward compli-
" ance *." Here it is to be observed;

1. That superstition is the *peculiar foible* in man; as natural and intrinsic to him, as an *innate weakness* in animals. He has it therefore from God and nature, in the same manner as animals have their innate weakness. And therefore it must be as unnatural for men to be without superstition, or not act according to it, as for animals to be without their innate weakness.

2. Mankind are, according to this account, in their natural state, entirely incapable of knowing any true religion. For if, as our author faith, *superstition be the opposite to true religion*; if this superstition be the *innate peculiar foible* of human nature; if mankind are not only to begin and end their lives among those that have all the *same foible*, but, what is worse, have at all times had this innate foible increased and practised upon by the crafty pretenders of their own species; are they not inwardly and outwardly fixed in superstition, the *opposite to true religion*?

Judge therefore by this, what our author *really* thinks of the *excellency* and *perfection* of the light of nature; and how much meaning he has in such exclamations as these: *And now let any one say, how it is possible God could more fully*

* Page 169.

*fully make known his will to all intelligent creatures, than by making every thing within and without them, a declaration of it ** ?

That is, How can they have a better *inward guide* to true religion, than by having an *innate peculiar foible* contrary to it ? How can they have a better *outward call* to the true religion, than by having all the world conspiring to fix them in superstition ?

For this, he says, is their state ; this innate peculiar foible has been at all times increased and practised upon by the more cunning of their species, and the *free-thinking few* forced into an *outward compliance*. It is this inward and outward state of Man, that throws our author into so much transport at its absolute perfection, as to matters of religion.

Again ; Judge from this with what piety and sincerity he speaks of God, when he says, *Infinite wisdom, directed by infinite goodness, will certainly give us equal degrees of evidence for religious truths, which so much concern us, as it has done for truths of less importance* †. For if our Author believed himself in this assertion, how could he believe superstition to be the *peculiar inborn foible of man* ? For can religious truths have the *same degrees of evidence* with things of less importance, if man's *peculiar foible* relates to religion ?

Again ; He cries out, *In what point is it, that men of the meanest abilities may not know their duty to God? Cannot they tell what sentiments*

ments inspire them with love and reverence for the deity*? Now put these things together, and then his argument will proceed thus: If superstition is *contrary* to true religion, and superstition be the *innate peculiar* foible of all men, how can the *weakest* man be in any mistake about what is right or wrong in religion? Let the reader here judge, whether I put any force upon his words,

Judge again, how serious this Author must be in a variety of such arguments as these: *If*, says he, *men have been at all times obliged to avoid superstition, and embrace true religion, there must have been at all times sufficient marks of distinction.* And again: *Nothing*, says he, *can be a greater libel on the true religion, than to suppose it does not contain such internal marks, as will, even to the meanest capacity, distinguish it from all false religions* †. But if superstition is the *innate, peculiar* foible of mankind, where must a man of the *meanest capacity* look for the *internal marks* of true religion? And if all the world is, and always was, over-run with superstition, and the *free-thinking* few have always been forced into an *outward compliance*, where must such a man look for the *outward marks* of true religion?

To give you one instance more of this writer's extravagant and inconsistent notions;

He makes *reason*, or *natural religion*, to be God's *internal revelation*, differing *only* from *external revelation* in the manner of its being

* Page 280.

† Page 295.

being communicated. He rejects *external revelation* as unworthy of God, because it has not been sufficiently made known at *all times*, and in *all places*; yet he sets up an internal revelation, as worthy of God, which has never been made known to any *one man* of any *time* or *place* in the world. For what one man ever knew that *reason* was God's *internal revelation*, to which nothing could be added by any *external revelation*?

It is a mighty complaint with our author against christianity, that so much happiness should be deferred till the time of *Tiberius*, and that it should be communicated to no greater a part of the world, than christianity hath been. But is not this a *judicious* complaint in the mouth of a person, that is setting up a religion, that has been communicated to no body but himself?

I know nothing that can be said for our author, in excuse of so much confusion and self-contradiction, unless it be the particular hardships of his *sect*. The *free-thinking few*, he says, *are forced into an outward compliance*; and that which *forces* a man into a state of hypocrisy, may force him into a great deal of confusion and self-contradiction.

To return: I have from a consideration of the state and condition of man, and the several relations which God stands in towards his creatures, shewn that it is utterly impossible for human reason to be a competent judge of
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the fitness, or unfitness, of all that God may, or may not require of us. The two following chapters shall state the nature and perfection of reason, considered in itself, or as it is a faculty, or principle of action in human nature.



C H A P. IV.

Of the state and nature of reason, as it is in man; and how its perfection in matters of religion is to be known.

THIS writer and others, who take to themselves the names of free-thinkers, make their court to the world, by pretending to vindicate the right that all men have, to judge and act according to their own reason. Though, I think, the world has no more to thank them for on this account, than if they had pretended to assert the right that every man has, to see *only* with his *own eyes*, or to hear *only* with his *own ears*.

For their own reason always did, does, and ever will, govern rational creatures, in every thing

thing they determine, either in speculation or practice. It is not a matter of *duty* for men to use their own reason, but of *necessity*: and it is as impossible to do otherwise, as for a being that cannot act but from choice, to act without choice. And if a man was to try, not to act according to his own reason or choice, he would find himself under the same difficulty, as he that tries to think, without thinking upon something.

And if God was to command us, by fresh revelations every day of our lives, not to act from a principle of reason and choice, such revelations could have no more effect upon us, than if they came from the weakest amongst mankind. For, as our principle of acting is not derived from ourselves, so it is no more in our power to alter it, or contradict it, than it is in the power of matter not to *gravitate*, or to exist, without taking up some *place*.

Man is under the same necessity of acting from his own choice, that *matter* is of not acting at all; and a being, whose principle of action is reason and choice, can no more act without it, or contrary to it, than an extended being can be without extension.

All men therefore are equally reasonable in this respect, that they are, and must be, by a *necessity* of nature, equally directed and governed by their own reason and choice.

For, as the principle of action, in human nature, is *reason* and *choice*, and nothing can be done, or believed, but for *some reason*, any more

more than a thing can be chosen and not be chosen ; so the acting according to one's own reason is not the privilege of the *philosopher*, but essential to human nature ; and as inseparable from all persons, as self-consciousness, or a sense of their own existence.

The dispute therefore betwixt christians and *unbelievers*, concerning reason, is not, whether men are to use their *own reason*, any more than whether they are to see with their *own eyes* ; but whether every man's reason must needs guide him by its *own light*, or must cease to guide him, as soon as it guides him by a light borrowed from revelation ? This is the true state of the question, not whether reason is to be followed, but when it is *best* followed ? not whether it is to be our guide, but how it may be made our *safest guide* ?

The *free-thinkers*, therefore, rather appeal to the passions, than reason of the people, when they represent the clergy and christianity as enemies to reason, and just thinking, and themselves as friends and advocates for the use of reason.

For christians oppose unbelievers, not because they *reason*, but because they *reason ill*. They receive revelation, not to suppress the natural power, but to give new and heavenly light to their reason ; not to take away their right of judging for themselves, but to secure them from false judgments.

If therefore a poor peasant should call upon our *free-thinkers*, to lay aside their *bigotry* to *ideas*,

ideas, arguments, and philosophy, and govern themselves by reason; it would be no more absurd, than for them to exhort christians to lay aside their bigotry to *creeds* and *doctrines* of revelation, and to govern themselves by reason.

For it may as well be affirmed, that a man departs from the use of his reason, because he depends upon *ideas, arguments, and syllogisms*; as that he departs from the use of his reason, because he proceeds upon *prophecies, miracles, and revelations*.

And if he uses his reason weakly, and is subject to delusion in these points, he no more renounces his reason, or goes over to another direction, than *Hobbes, Spinoza, Bayle, Collins, or Toland*, renounce their reason, when they take their own *fancies* to be demonstrations.

Christians therefore do not differ from unbelievers in the *constant use* of their reason, but in the *manner* of using it: As *virtuous* men differ from *rakes*, not in their desire of happiness, but in their manner of seeking it.

And though this writer is very free in his charge of *bigotry* upon christians, yet I may venture to challenge him to shew, that there can possibly be more *bigotry* on the side of religion, than there may be against it. For as *bigotry* is nothing but weak reasoning, so *infidels* are entitled to as large a share of it, as believers; and to suppose that bigotry may be charged upon those who have a zeal for christianity, but cannot be charged on them that are

are zealous *against* it, is as just a way of proceeding, as to say of two *brothers*, that one is to be charged with *passion*, because he *loves* his father, but the other cannot be charged with *passion*, because he *bates* his father.

And as men that write against religion, are as much concerned to have it false, as those who write for it, are to have it true; so all that there is to blind and prejudice the latter, has the same power to blind and prejudice the former.

It appears from what has been said, that every man's own reason is his only principle of action, and that he must judge according to it, whether he receives, or rejects revelation.

Now although every man is to judge according to the light of his own reason, yet his reason has very little light that can be called *its own*. For, as we derive our nature from our parents, so that which we generally call *natural knowledge*, or the light of *nature*, is a knowledge and light that is made natural to us, by the *same authority*, which makes a certain *language*, certain *customs*, and *modes* of behaviour, natural to us.

Nothing seems to be our own, but a *bare capacity* to be instructed, a nature *fitted* for any impressions; as capable of vice as virtue; as ready to be made a vicious animal, as a religious rational creature; as liable to be made a *Hottentot*, by being born among Hottentots,

as

as to be a *Christian*, by being born among Christians.

It is not my intention by this, to signify, that there is not a *good* and *evil*, *right* and *wrong*, founded in the nature of things; or that morality has any dependence upon the *opinions* or *customs* of men; but only to shew, that we *find* out this right and wrong, come to a *sense* of this good and evil, not by any inward strength, or light, that our *natural reason* of itself affords, but by such *external means*, as people are taught *articulate language*, *civility*, *politeness*, or any other *rules* of civil life.

Men do not prefer virtue to vice, from a philosophical contemplation of the fitness of the one, and the unfitness of the other, founded in the nature of things; but because it is a judgment as *early* in their minds, as their knowledge of the words, virtue and vice.

And it can no more be reasonably affirmed, that our knowledge of God and divine things, our opinions in morality, of the excellency of this, or that virtue, of the immortality of our souls, of a future life of rewards and punishments, are the effects of our natural light; than it can be reasonably affirmed, that our living in *society*, our *articulate language*, and *erect posture*, are owing to the light of nature.

For, as all mankind find themselves in this state, before any reasoning about it; as *education*, and *human authority* have set our bodies *upright*

upright, taught us *language*, and accustomed us to the *rules* and *manners* of a social life; so *education*, and the *same human authority*, have impressed and planted in our minds, certain notions of God and divine things, and formed us to a sense of good and evil, a belief of our soul's immortality, and the expectation of another life.

And mankind are no more left to find out a God, or the fitness of moral virtue, by their own reason, than they are left by their own reason to find out who are their parents, or to find out the fitness of speaking an articulate language, or the reasonableness of living in society.

On the contrary; we know that our manner of coming into the world, subjects us, without any choice, to the *language*, *sentiments*, *opinions*, and *manners*, of those amongst whom we are born. And although when we come to any strength, or art of reasoning, or have a *genius* for philosophic enquiries, we may thence deduce proofs of the *Being* and *Attributes* of God, the *reasonableness* of religion and morality, the *nature* of our souls, and the *certainty* of a future state, and find that the opinions and tradition of mankind concerning these things are well founded; yet these are an *after-knowledge*, not common to men, but accidental confirmations of that knowledge and belief of a God, religion and morality, which were before fixed in us, more or less, by education, and the authority of those amongst whom we have lived.

And

And as no *Philosopher* ever proved the *fitness* of human nature for a *social* life, from principles of reason and speculation, who had not *first* been taught the nature and advantage of Society *another way*; so no one ever pretended to prove the Being and Attributes of God, or the excellency of moral virtue, who had not *first* been taught the knowledge of God, and moral virtue *some other way*.

Now if this is the state of reason, as it is in man; if this is all the light that we have from our *own nature*, a *bare capacity* of receiving good or bad impressions, right or wrong opinions and sentiments, according to the state of the world that we fall into; then we are but poorly furnished, to assert and maintain the *absolute perfection* of our own reason.

If our light is little more than the opinions and customs of those amongst whom we live, and it be so hard for a man to arrive at a greater wisdom, than the common wisdom of the *place* or *country* which gave him birth and education; how unreasonably do we appeal to the perfection and sufficiency of our own reason, against the *necessity* and *advantage* of divine revelation?

If we are *nothing* without the assistance of men; if we are a kind of foolish, helpless animals, till education and experience have *revealed* to us the wisdom and knowledge of our fellow-creatures; shall we think ourselves too wise and full of our own light, to be farther

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enlightened with a knowledge and wisdom revealed to us by God himself?

This gentleman, speaking of education, saith, *Education is justly esteemed a second nature; and its force is so strong, that few can wholly shake off its prejudices, even in things unreasonable and unnatural; and must it not have the greatest efficacy in things agreeable to reason, and suitable to nature **?

All that I shall add to this account, is only this, That we are, by the circumstances and condition of human life, necessarily subjected to this *second nature*, and cannot avoid coming under its power.

But here let me ask this pleader for the sufficiency of the light of nature, how those that resign themselves up to the light of their *own nature*, shall know, whether it is their *first*, or their *second* nature that directs them?

Here are, it seems, *two natures*; they may be as different as good and evil; yet as they are both *natures*, both *internal light*, how shall a man know which he follows? He does not know which was first, or why he should call one first, and the other second; they are both internal, and without any thing to distinguish them. And as he is not to *resist* the motions of nature, or *stifle* its directions; so he must be as *obedient* to the directions of the *second*, as of the *first nature*, because he does not perceive their difference, nor has any means to distinguish their operations.

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* Page 166.

He therefore that asserts the light of nature to be a *sufficient unerring* guide in divine matters, ought either to shew, that our *second nature* is as *safe* a guide as the first; or that though it is nature, yet it has no *natural power* over us.

For since every man is *necessitated* to take upon him a *second nature*, which he does not *know* to be a *second*, or *when* it began, or *how far* it has proceeded, or how *contrary* it is to his *first nature*; he that would prove the light of nature to be so perfect, that nothing can be added to it, is obliged to prove, that our *second nature*, which we receive by education, has the *same degree* of perfection. For so far as our *second nature* is *different* from the *first*, so far it has *changed* the *first*; and if we are to follow nature exclusive of revelation, we may take *revenge*, *self-murder*, *incontinence*, *sensuality*, *pride*, *baughtiness*, *self-conceit*, and a *contempt* of all things *sacred*, to be the true dictates and directions of nature.

For as it may be very easy, and I am afraid often happens to people, to be thus educated; so if education is a *second nature*, and nature is to be esteemed a *true and perfect* guide; a man thus educated, has all his vices made so many glorious laws of nature; and through the strength of his natural light, he condemns humility, self-denial, and devotion, as foolish bigotry.

This writer says, *Natural religion*, that is, the religion of nature, is a *perpetual standing*

rule for men of the meanest, as well as the highest capacities, and carries its own evidence with it, those internal, inseparable marks of truth *.

But if education is a *second nature*, and, as this writer affirms, *has the force of a second nature even in things unreasonable and unnatural*; then this second nature has not only its natural religion, which is also a *perpetual standing rule for men of the meanest, as well as the highest capacities*; *which carries its own evidence with it, those internal, inseparable marks of truth*; but it may also have a natural religion, both *unreasonable and unnatural*; since it is here affirmed, that education has the force of nature even in things of this kind.

Again; If education has this force of nature even in things unreasonable and unnatural, and still greater force in things agreeable to nature; if it is also absolutely necessary for all men to come under the power of *some second nature*; what can be more vain or groundless, than to pretend to *state the light, or rectitude of human nature*, since it must be for the most part in every man, as the *uncertainty, variety, happiness or unhappiness of education* has rendered it?

And our author can no more tell, what man would be, without human education, or what nature would do for those who had no foreign instruction, than he can tell what sort of beings dwell in the moon. And yet he that does

* Page 243.

does not know this, how can he know what the light of nature is in itself?

For if most of our judgments, opinions, tempers, and ways of thinking, are owing to education, and the authority of that part of the world where we dwell; if these impressions have the power of a *second nature* upon us, then the light of *nature* can no more be distinguished from the light of *education*, than the strength which we have from *nature*, can be distinguished from the strength which we have from our *food*.

So that to declare the light of nature so absolutely perfect, as to be incapable of all improvement even by divine revelation, is no less an extravagance, than to declare the education of mankind to be absolutely perfect in the *same degree*.

For if nature not only *wants*, but cannot possibly *avoid* education; if this *necessary unavoidable* education becomes *another nature*, undiscernible from the first; then nothing can possibly be affirmed of the perfection of the light of nature, but what must be affirmed in the *same degree* of the perfection of education. And he that affirms that mankind have had, at *all times*, and in *all places* of the world, the *same sufficient, perfect* light of nature, must affirm, that mankind have had, at all times and in all places of the world, the same *perfect, unerring* education.

When therefore it is just, and fitting for all people, to abide by the *absolute perfection* of

their *education*, the *infallible light* of their *second nature*, as the unerring standard, measure, and rule of all that is to be esteemed *moral*, *religious*, and *divine*; then it may be just to appeal to the *natural light* of all men, of all ages, and all places, as a *sufficient teacher* of all that ought, or ought not to be a matter of religion.

For till it can be shewn, that men are not liable to a *second nature* from education, or that there is, or can be any nature without it; the *state of nature* must *differ* all over the world, and in every age of the world, just as the light, and advantages of education, have *differed* in the several parts, and ages of the world.

In a word, the religious and moral light of our *first nature*, is just as great as the *first strength* of infants; and the religious and moral light of our *second nature*, is just as perfect as our *education*, and as much of our own growth, as the first language that we are taught to speak.

May not therefore one justly wonder, what it is that could lead any people into an imagination of the absolute perfection of *human reason*? There seems no more in the state of mankind, to betray a man into this fancy, than to persuade him, that the reason of *infants* is absolutely perfect. For sense and experience, are as full and strong a proof against one, as against the other.

But

But it must be said for these writers, that they decline all arguments from facts and experience, to give a better account of human nature; but with the same justice, as if a man was to lay aside the authority of *history*, to give you a truer account of the life of *Alexander*.

They argue about the perfection of human reason, not as if it were something *already* in being, that had its *nature* and *condition*, and shewed itself to be what it is; but as if it were something that might take its state and condition, according to their fancies and speculations about it.

Their objection against revelation is founded upon the pretended *sufficiency*, and *absolute perfection*, of the light and strength of human reason, to teach all men all that is wise, and holy, and divine, in religion. But how do they prove this perfection of human reason? Do they appeal to mankind as proofs of this perfection? Do they produce any body of men, in this, or any other age of the world, that without any assistance from revelation, have attained to this perfection of religious knowledge? This is not so much as pretended to: The history of such men is entirely wanting. And yet the want of such a fact as this, has even the force of demonstration against this pretended sufficiency of natural reason.

Because it is a matter not capable of any other kind of proof, but must be admitted as certainly true, or rejected as certainly false, ac-

cording as fact and experience bear witness for, or against it.

For an enquiry about the light, and strength, and sufficiency of reason, to guide and preserve men in the knowledge and practice of true religion, is a question, as *solely* to be resolved by *fact and experience*, as if the enquiry was about the *shape* of man's body, or the *number* of his senses. And to talk of a light and strength of reason, natural to man, which fact and experience have never yet proved, is as egregious nonsense, as to talk of natural senses, or faculties of his body, which fact and experience have never yet discovered.

For as the *existence* of man cannot be proved, but from fact and experience; so every *quality* of man, whether of body or mind, and every degree of that quality, can only be proved by fact and experience.

The degrees of human *strength*, the nature of human *passions*, the duration of human *life*, the light and strength of human *reason* in matters of religion, are things not possible to be known in any *other degree*, than *so far* as fact and experience prove them.

From the bare consideration of a rational soul in union with a body, and bodily passions, we can neither prove man to be *strong* or *weak*, *good* or *bad*, *sickly* or *sound*, *mortal* or *immortal*: all these qualities must discover themselves, as the *eye* discovers its degree of *sight*, the *hand* its degree of *strength*, &c.

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To enquire therefore, whether men have by nature light and strength sufficient to guide, and keep them in the true religion; is the same appeal to fact and experience, as to enquire, whether men are *mortal, sickly, or sound*; or how far they can *see* and *hear*. For nothing that relates to human nature, as a quality of it, can possibly have any other proof.

As therefore these Gentlemen are, in this debate, without any proof, or even pretence of proof, from fact and experience, so their cause ought to be looked upon to be as vain and romantic, as if they had asserted, that men have senses naturally fitted to hear sounds, and see objects at all distances, though fact and experience, the only means of knowing it, if it was so, has, from the creation to this time, proved the quite contrary.

For he that asserts the sufficiency of the light and strength of reason, to guide men in matters of religion, is not only without any positive proof from fact or experience on his side, but has the history of all ages, for near six thousand years past, fully demonstrating the quite contrary.

If some other enquirers into human nature, should affirm, that there is in mankind a *natural instinct* of mutual love, *sufficient* to make every man, at all times, love every other man, with the *same degree* of affection, as he loves himself; I suppose such an opinion would be thought too absurd and extravagant, to need any confutation. And yet all the absurdity of it

it would lie in this, that it affirmed something of the *sufficiency* of a natural quality in man, which could not be supported by a single instance of any one man, and was contrary to the experience and history of every age of the world.

Now this is exactly the case of these gentlemen : their opinion has neither more nor less absurdity in it : they only affirm such a sufficiency of light and reason to be natural to all men, as cannot be supported by a single instance of any one man, that ever lived, and is fully contradicted by the experience and history of every age since the creation of the world.

By what has been here said, I hope the reader will observe, that this enquiry about the perfection or imperfection, the strength or weakness, of reason in man, as to matters of religion, rests *wholly* upon fact and experience ; and that therefore all speculative reasonings upon it, are to be looked upon as idle, and visionary, as a sick man's dreams about health ; and as wholly to be rejected, as any speculative arguments that should pretend to prove, in spite of all facts and experience, the *immortality*, and *unalterable* state of human bodies.

Our author himself seems very sensible, that the argument drawn from facts and experience pressed hard upon his cause ; and therefore has given the best answer to it, he can yet think of.

It cannot, says he, be imputed to any defect in the light of nature, that the Pagan world ran

ran into idolatry; but to their being entirely governed by priests, who pretended communication with their Gods, and to have thence their revelations, which they imposed on the credulous, as divine oracles.

The truth and justness of this assertion, will fully appear by the following illustration.

" It cannot be imputed to any defect in " the health, and soundness of man's natural " constitution, that the world has, in all ages, " been over-run with diseases and distempers; " but to their being entirely governed by phy- " sicians, who pretended to I know not " what secret knowledge of medicines, which " they imposed on the sickly, as infallible " remedies."

For, as a perfect state of health, conscious to itself of a sufficiency of natural strength to keep clear of all diseases, seems to be out of all danger from physicians; so had mankind been ever conscious to themselves, of a sufficient natural knowledge of what is true or false in religion; or, as this author saith, such as enabled men of the meanest capacity to distinguish between religion and superstition *, what room had there been for frauds and impostures in religion?

If a man whose business it was to provide himself with a quantity of *pure gold*, should be continually buying *lead*, and *brass*, and *iron*, instead of it; would you say, that his falling into such mistakes, was not to be im-puted

* Page 3.

puted to any *defect* in his knowledge of *pure gold*, or how to distinguish it from other metals; but to the *lyes* and *affirmations* of those who told him, that such lead, and brass, and iron, were pure gold?

Farther; This author saith, the world did not run into idolatry through any defect in the light of nature, but because they were *credulous*.

Now credulity, *so far* as it goes in any matter, supposes an *equal degree* of ignorance in that matter, whatever it is. No man is *credulous* of false accounts, or fabulous relations, where he knows the truth.

Children are exceeding *credulous*, because they are exceeding *ignorant*; and in the same degree as their knowledge increases, their credulity abates. So that to say, men ran into idolatry, not through want of light, or ignorance of what is true and false in religion, but because they were *credulous*; is as nice a distinction, as if it should be said, that children believe any fable that you can tell them, not because they are *ignorant* of what is true or false, but because they are *credulous*.

Or as it may be said, in another matter, with the same justness of thought, that such an *army* ran away from the enemy, not through any defect in *natural courage*, but because they were *affrighted*.

For men may as justly be said to have a perfect courage, and yet be governed by their fears, as to have perfect knowledge of that which

which is true in religion, and yet be credulous of that which is false.

This *Anti-pastor*, in his second Address says, *Can the superstition of the Pagans be imputed to any defect, or insufficiency in the light of reason, when it was wholly owing to their abandoning that divine light; and in defiance of it, running into senseless traditions?**

But how came it, that they ran into senseless traditions? What was it that admitted these traditions, as just and good? Why, it was that faculty which judges of every thing, and which this writer recommends as an unerring guide. And to say, a man's superstition is not owing to any defect or weakness of his reason, but to his admitting senseless traditions, is as vain an observation, as to say, a man's false reasoning is not owing to any weakness of his reason, but to his admitting and proceeding upon foolish, and absurd arguments.

For, foolish and absurd arguments do not more shew the state of his reason, who proceeds upon them, than senseless traditions shew the state of his reason, who admits them: For they are as much the objects of his reason, as arguments; and all that is senseless and absurd in either of them, must either be charged equally upon the reason of him that admits them, or both equally removed from it. So that if senseless traditions, are not a proof of the weakness of their reason that approve of them, neither

* Page 37.

neither are foolish and absurd arguments a proof of the weakness of their reason, who proceed upon them.

Again; Supposing, as he saith, that the *Pagans*, *in defiance of their reason*, received such traditions: Does this do any credit to the light of reason? For how can a man renounce his reason, but by an act of his reason?

But, is it not as great a reproach to reason, to renounce itself, as to credit a false tradition? For a *reason* that can, *knowingly*, lay aside itself, is in a more defective and disordered state, than a reason that is only capable of being deluded. But if reason, in this case, lays aside itself, *without knowing it*, then, I suppose, such an *accident* may be fairly attributed to some weakness and defect of reason.

He proceeds thus: *It is certainly no good argument against the sufficiency of the divine light of nature, that men could not err, except they left it, and followed vain traditions* *.

This observation has just the same sense and acuteness in it, as if it had been said, *It is certainly no good argument against the sufficiency of the divine healthfulness of human nature, that men could not be sickly, except they left it, and fell into various distempers: Or, against the sufficiency of the divine strength of natural courage, that men could not be timorous, till they left it, and followed vain fears.* For, to prove that reason is sufficient, because every thing that is absurd, is contrary to reason, is like

* Second Address, page 39.

like proving our healthfulness to be sufficient, because all distempers are contrary to it; or our courage to be sufficient, because fears and cowardice are contrary to it.

Besides, how is it that men leave their reason? Why, just as ignorant men leave their knowledge; as dull people leave their wit, or cowards leave their courage. The first part of this paragraph tells you of a *sufficiency of the divine light of nature*: Well; what has this divine light of nature done? what sufficient effects has it had? Why, it has covered all the world with darkness. For, as a proof of the sufficiency of this divine light, he adds, in the very next words, *Whoever considers how all mankind, even the wisest nations, have been imposed on by senseless tales, and idle stories, consecrated by length of time*; well, what then? what should he conclude from this consideration? Ought he not to conclude, that the reason of the wisest men of all nations, runs very low in matters of religion? This is the only conclusion that common sense can draw from such an observation: But, our author says, *Whoever considers this, will not be very fond of relying upon tradition in matters of religion.*

As if he had said, Whoever considers how all mankind, even the wisest of men, have been imposed upon by absurd arguments, will not be very fond of relying upon arguments. For idle tales, and senseless traditions in matters of religion, impose upon men, in no other manner, than false arguments, and absurd conclusions,

sions, impose upon them. And as it is their own reason, that gives the strength and appearance of truth to a senseless argument; so it is their own reason, that gives the credibility, and appearance of truth to senseless traditions.

And to lay the fault upon tradition, and not upon reason that approves it, is as just, as to lay the fault upon an abominable argument, and not upon reason, that proceeds upon it.

Again; Supposing that *all mankind, even the wisest nations*, have for this six thousand years been thus imposed upon, not knowing how to distinguish idle tales and senseless traditions from true religion; is not this a noble foundation for this writer to build the *sufficiency of the divine light of nature upon?* For supposing it had been in the greatest degree *insufficient*, what other effect could have followed from it, but only this, that *all mankind, even the wisest nations*, should have been over-run with error? And is it not strange, that effects should bear no proportion to their causes; that the same things should follow from the *sufficiency* of the divine light of nature, which must have followed from its *greatest imperfection and insufficiency?*

And must not the enemies of *reason* and *free-thinking* be forced to confess, that this writer hath chosen an excellent guide for himself; since he so fully acknowledges, that no one yet has been rightly guided by it? Must not

not his present undertaking be granted to be the effect of cool and sober deliberation, since it only calls people of *all*, even the *meanest, capacities*, to such an use of their reason, as the wisest of men and nations have always been strangers to?

Again; It is pretended, that the absurdities of the Pagan world are not owing to any defect of reason, but to their *undue use* of reason. The Bishop of *London* very justly observes, that such a pretence is *begging the question*. Our author thinks not. I will therefore grant, that it was through an *undue use* of their reason. For granting that mankind fell into all those absurdities, by an undue use of their reason, the charge against reason is rather increased than abated. For an undue use of it, is as great an accusation of reason, as any *weakness* or *blindness* that can be attributed to it. For to distinguish betwixt the defect of reason, and the undue use of reason, is as solid, as to distinguish betwixt the perfection of reason, and a due use of reason. For is not a due use of reason, so far as it proceeds, a certain sign of its perfection? Must not therefore the *undue use* of reason, so far as it proceeds, be an equally certain sign of its imperfection?

For what can make an undue use of reason, but itself? And if reason is so universally liable to an *undue use* of itself, that the universal ignorance and corruption of mankind is to be ascribed to it, then this undue use of reason, is as great a sign of its universal weakness and imperfection, as any thing else can be.

This *undue use* of reason, is either voluntary and known, or involuntary and unknown. If it is the latter, then it resolves itself into that natural weakness and infirmity, which his Lordship has so fully proved to belong to human reason. If it is the former, then it may justly be reckoned a *greater disorder*, and such as makes reason more unfit to be a guide, than all the weakness, blindness, and corruption, which his Lordship hath accused it of.



C H A P. V.

Shewing, that all the mutability of our tempers, the disorders of our passions, the corruption of our hearts, all the reveries of the imagination, all the contradictions and absurdities that are to be found in human life, and human opinions, are strictly and precisely the mutability, disorders, corruption, and absurdities of human reason.

IT is the intent of this chapter to shew, that although common language ascribes a variety of faculties and principles to the soul, imputing this action to the blindness of our *pas-*
sions,

sions, that to the inconstancy of our *tempers*; one thing to the heat of our *imagination*, another to the coolness of our *reason*; yet, in strictness of truth, every thing that is done by us, is the action and operation of our reason, and is to be ascribed to it, as the sole faculty or principle from whence it proceeded, and by which it is governed and effected.

This writer takes a great deal of pains to prove, by *long quotations*, what no body denies, that there is a *law* or *light* of reason common to men. All this is as freely granted, as that *love* and *hatred*, *feeling* and *sensation*, are common to men; and is granting no more, than that men are by nature intelligent and rational beings: For the faculties of man, as he is an intelligent being, as necessarily perceive some difference in actions, as to *good* and *bad*, as they perceive some things they like, and some things they dislike. In this sense there is a law or light of reason common to all men: And the law of reason is in men, as the law of *thinking*, of *liking*, and *disliking*, is in men.

And the different degrees of reason are in men, as the different degrees of love and aversion; as the different degrees of wit, parts, good nature, or ill nature, are in man.

And as all men have naturally more or less of these qualities, so all men have naturally more or less of reason: And the bulk of mankind are as different in reason, as they are in these qualities.

As love is the same passion in all men, yet is infinitely different; as hatred is the same pa-

sion in all men, yet with infinite differences; so reason is the same faculty in all men, yet with infinite differences.

And as our passions not only make us different from other men, but frequently and almost daily different from ourselves, loving and hating under great inconstancy; so our reason is not only different from the reason of other men, but is often different from itself; by a strange inconstancy, setting up first one opinion, and then another.

So that when we talk of *human reason*, or a reason *common* to mankind, we talk of as *various*, *uncertain*, and *unmeasurable* a thing, as when we talk of a *love*, a *liking*, an *aversion*, a *good nature*, or *ill nature*, common to mankind; for these qualities admit of no variation, uncertainty, or mutability, but such as they directly receive from the *reason* of mankind.

For it is as much the reason of man that acts in all these tempers, and makes them to be just what they are, as it is the reason of man that demonstrates a mathematical proposition.

Was our reason steady, and of one kind, there would be just the same steadiness and regularity in our tempers; did not reason fall into mistakes, follies and absurdities, we should have nothing foolish or absurd in our love or aversion. For every humour, every kind of love or aversion, is as strictly the *action* or *operation* of our reason, as judgment is the act of our reason.

And the tempers and passions of a child, differ only from the tempers and passions of a man,

man, exactly in the same degree, as the reason of a child differs from the reason of man.

So that our passions and tempers, are the natural actions and real effects of our reason, and have no qualities, either good or bad, but such as are to be imputed to it.

A laudable good nature, or a laudable aversion, is only reason acting in a *certain manner*; a criminal good nature, or a criminal aversion, is nothing else but an ill-judging reason; that is, reason acting in another certain manner.

But still it is reason, or our understanding that is the *only agent* in our bad passions, as well as good passions; and as much the *sole agent* in all our passions and tempers, as in things of mere speculation.

So that the state of reason in human life, is nothing else but the state of human tempers and passions: And right reason in morality, is nothing else but right love, and right aversion.

And all our tempers and ways of liking and disliking, are as much the acts and operations of our reason, as the wisest actions of our life; and they only differ from reason, as reason differs from itself, when it judges rightly, and when it judges erroneously.

All *that* therefore which we commonly call the weakness, blindness, and disorder of our *passions*, is in reality the weakness, blindness, and disorder of our *reason*. For a right love, or wrong love, denotes only reason acting in a *certain, particular* manner.

So that if any thing can be said precisely, or with exactness, of love, aversion, good na-

ture, or ill nature, as common to mankind ; the same may be said of reason, as common to mankind.

And if it would be very foolish and absurd, to ascribe an absolute perfection to human love, making it alone a sufficient guide to all good, or an absolute perfection to human hatred, as a sufficient preservative from all vice ; it is equally absurd to ascribe the same perfection to human reason, because neither love nor hatred have any thing perfect or imperfect, good or bad in them, but what is solely the action and operation of reason.

For the distinction of our reason from our passions, is only a distinction in language, made at pleasure; and is no more real in the things themselves, than the *desire* and *inclination* are really different from the *will*. All therefore that is weak and foolish in our passions, is the weakness and folly of our reason; all the inconstancy and caprice of our humours and tempers, is the caprice and inconstancy of our reason.

It is not *flattery* that compliments vice in authority ; it is not *corruption* that makes men prostitute their honour ; it is not *sensuality* that plunges men into *debauchery* ; it is not *avarice* that makes men sordid ; it is not *ambition* that makes them restless ; it is not *bribery* that makes men sell their consciences ; it is not *interest* that makes them lye, and cheat, and perjure themselves. What is it therefore ? Why, it is that *absolutely perfect* faculty, which our author sets up as the *unerring standard* of all that is *wise, holy and good* ; it is in his strong language, *reason, the use of reason, human reason*, that does all this.

For whether any thing be fit to be done, it is, as he says, *reason alone which must judge; as the eye is the sole judge of what is visible, the ear of what is audible, so reason of what is reasonable.*

Every thing therefore that is done, every thing that is chosen or preferred in human life before any thing else, is as strictly done, or chosen by reason, as every thing that is seen, is seen by the eye; and every thing that is heard, is heard by the ear.

To suppose that reason permits itself to be governed by passions or tempers, but is not the *immediate, full agent* of all that is done by them, is as absurd, as to suppose that reason permits itself to be governed by the *hand* when it is writing falsely, or the *tongue* when it is talking profanely, but is not the immediate, direct agent of all that is written and spoken by them.

Brutes are incapable of imprudence and immorality, because none of their actions are the actions of *reason*: Every thing therefore that is imprudence, immorality, baseness, or villany in us, must be the act of our reason; otherwise it could no more be imprudent or immoral, than the actions of brutes.

If therefore, as this author often saith, reason be the only faculty that distinguisheth us from brutes; it necessarily follows, that those irregularities, whether of humour, passions, or tempers, which cannot be imputed to brutes, must be solely attributed to that faculty by which we are distinguished from brutes; and

consequently, every thing that is foolish, vain, shameful, false, treacherous, and base, must be the sole express acts of our reason ; since if they were the acts of any thing else, they could have no more vanity, falseness, or baseness, than hunger and thirst.

As therefore all that is faithful, just, and wise, can only be attributed to that which is done by our reason ; so by plain consequence, all that is vain, false, or shameful, can only be imputed to any acts, as they are the acts of reason.

It is not my intent in the least to censure, or condemn our common language, which confiders and talks of reason and the passions, as if they were as different as a *governor* and his *subjects*.

These forms of speech are very intelligible and useful, and give great life and ornament to all discourses upon morality ; and are even necessary for the Historian, the Poet, and the Orator.

But when certain persons ascribe to human reason, as a *distinct faculty* of human nature, I know not what *absolute perfection*, making it as immutable, and incapable of any addition or improvement, as God himself ; it is necessary to consider human reason, and human nature, not as it is represented in common language, but as it is in reality in itself.

Notwithstanding therefore in common language, our passions and the effects of them, are very usefully distinguished from our reason, I have here ventured to shew, that all the disorders

orders of human nature, are precisely the disorders of human reason, and that all the perfection or imperfection of our passions, is nothing else but the perfection or imperfection of our reason.

And we may as well think, that judgment, prudence, discretion, are things different from our reason, as that humour, temper, approbation, or aversion, are really different from our reason.

For, as it is a right exercise of reason, that denominates its actions to be *prudence, judgment, and discretion*; so it is a wrong exercise of reason, that denominates its actions to be *humour, temper, and caprice*.

And it would be as absurd to condemn humour and caprice, if they were not the actions and operations of reason, as to commend a prudence and discretion that were the effects of an irrational principle.

Our follies therefore and absurdities of every kind, are as necessarily to be ascribed to our reason, as the *first, immediate, and sole cause* of them, as our wisdom and discretion are to be ascribed to it in that degree.

The difference between reason assenting to the properties of a *square*, and reason acting in motions of desire or aversion, is only this, that in the latter case, it is reason acting under a sense of its own *good* or *evil*, in the former case, it is reason acting under a sense of *magnitude*.

And as the relations of magnitude, as they are the objects of our reason, are only the ob-

jects of its *assent* or *dissent*; so good and evil, as they are objects of our reason, are only the objects of its *desire* or *aversion*; And as the assent or dissent, in matters of speculation, whether right or wrong, is solely the act of our reason; so desire or aversion, in human life, whether right or wrong, is equally the act of our reason.

All the good therefore, that there is in any of the desires or aversions of the mere natural man, is the good of our reason; and all the evil or blindness that there is in any of our passions, is solely the evil and blindness of our reason.

Because love, desire, aversion, considered as operations proceeding from mere nature alone, denote nothing else but our reason acting in a certain manner; just as prudence, discretion, and judgment, when considered as our own abilities, or strength, denote nothing else but our reason acting in a certain manner.

We often say, that our passions deceive us, or persuade us; but this is no more strictly so, than when we say, our *interest* deceived, or a *bribe* blinded us. For bribes and interest are not active principles, nor have any power of deception; it is only our reason that gives them a false value, and prefers them to a greater good.

It is just so in what we call the deceit of our passions: They meddle with us no more than bribes meddle with us; but that pleasurable perception, which is to be found in certain enjoyments, is by our reason preferred.

red to that better good, which we might expect from a self-denial.

We say again, that our passions paint things in false colours, and present to our minds vain appearances of happiness.

But this is no more strictly true, than when we say, our *imagination* forms castles in the air. For the imagination signifies no distinct faculty from our reason, but only reason acting upon our own *ideas*.

So when our passions are said to give false colours to things, or present vain appearances of happiness, it is only our reason acting upon its own ideas of *good* and *evil*, just as it acts upon its own ideas of *architecture*, in forming castles in the air.

So that all *that* which we call different faculties of the soul, tempers and passions of the heart, strictly speaking, means nothing else, but the various acts and operations of one and the same rational principle, which has different names, according to the objects that it acts upon, and the manner of its acting.

In some things it is called speculative, in others it is called practical reason. And we may as justly think our speculative reason, is a different faculty from our practical reason, as that our tempers, aversions, or likings, are not as fully and solely to be ascribed to our reason, as syllogisms and demonstrations.

It was as truly reason that made *Medea* kill her children, that made *Cato* kill himself, that made Pagans offer human sacrifices to idols; that made *Epicurus* deny a providence, *Mahomet*

homet pretend a revelation ; that made some men sceptics, others bigots ; some enthusiasts, others profane ; that made *Hobbes* assert all religion to be human invention, and *Spinoza* to declare trees, and stones, and animals, to be parts of God ; that makes free-thinkers deny freedom of will, and fatalists exhort to a reformation of manners ; that made *Vaux* a conspirator, and *Ludlow* a regicide ; that made *Muggleton* a fanatic, and *Rochester* a libertine : It was as truly human reason that did all these things, as it is human reason that demonstrates mathematical propositions.

Medea and *Cato* acted as truly according to the judgment of their reason at that time, as the *confessor* that chuses rather to suffer, than deny his faith.

And the difference between them does not consist in this, that one power or faculty of the mind acted in one of them, and another faculty or power of the mind acted in another ; that is, that reason acted in one of them, and passion in another ; but purely in the different state of their reason. For had not *Medea* and *Cato* thought it best to do what they did, at the time they did it, they would no more have done it, than the *confessor* would chuse to suffer rather than deny his faith, unless he had judged it best so to do.

It may indeed be well enough said in common language, that passion made *Medea* and *Cato* to do as they did, just as it may be said of a man that affirms a *plenum*, or holds any speculative absurdity, that it is blindness, or prejudice

judice, that keeps him in it. Not as if blindness and prejudice were powers or faculties of his mind, but as they signify the *ill state* of his reason. Just so the passions may be said to govern men in their actions; not as if they were powers of the mind, but as they denote the disordered state of reason. And whenever any thing is imputed to the strength and violence of our passions, strictly speaking, it only means the weakness and low condition of our reason at that time.

For reason governs as fully, when our actions and tempers are ever so bad, as it does when our actions and tempers are sound and good. And the only difference is, that reason acting well governs in the one case, and reason acting ill governs in the other.

Just as it is the same reason that sometimes judges strictly right, which at other times judges exceeding wrong, in matters of speculation.

When therefore we say, that reason governs the passions, it means no more, in strict truth, than that reason governs itself; that it acts with deliberation and attention, does not yield to its first judgments or opinions, but uses second, and third thoughts.

So that guarding against the passions, is only guarding against its own first judgments and opinions; that is, guarding against itself.

To all this it may, perhaps, be objected, that our passions and tempers arise from bodily motions, and depend very much upon the state of our blood and animal spirits, and that therefore

fore what we do under their commotions, cannot be attributed to our reason.

It is readily granted, that the body has this share in our passions and tempers : But then the same thing must be granted of the body, in all the acts and operations of the mind. So that if our desires and aversions cannot be imputed to our reason, as its acts, because of the joint operation of the animal spirits in them ; no more can syllogisms and demonstrations be attributed to our reason, as its operations, because the operation of bodily spirits concurreth in the forming of them.

For the most abstract thought, and calm speculation of the mind, has as truly the *concurrence*, and *conjoint* operation of bodily spirits, as our strongest desires or aversions. And it is as much owing to the state of the body, that such speculations are what they are, as it is owing to the state of the body, that such passions are what they are.

For the motions of the bodily spirits are inseparable from, and according to, the state and action of the mind : When reason is in speculation of a trifle, they concur but *weakly* ; when reason speculates intensely, their operation is *increased*. And sometimes the attention of the mind is so great, and has so engaged and called in all the animal spirits to its assistance, that the operations of our senses are suspended, and we neither see, nor feel, till the attention of the mind has let the spirits return to all the parts of the body.

Now

Now will any one say, that these intense thoughts are less the acts of the mind, because they have a greater concurrence of bodily spirits, than when it is acting with indifference, and so has a lesser quantity of bodily spirits?

Yet this might as well be said, as to say, that the assent or dissent, in speculation, is the act of our reason; but liking or disliking, loving or hating, are not so the acts of our reason, because they have a greater concurrence, and different motions of bodily spirits.

For, as the mind is in a different state when it desires good, or fears evil, from what it is when it only compares two triangles; so the motions or concurrence of the bodily spirits, have only *such* a difference, as is strictly *correspondent* to these two states of the mind. They act and join as much in comparing the triangles, as in the desire of good, or fear of evil. And the mind is just so much governed by the body, in its passions, as it is governed by it in its calmest contemplations.

For as the gentle, quiet operation of the animal spirits is then strictly correspondent, and entirely owing to the state and action of the mind; so in all our passions, the strong and increased motion of the animal spirits, is then strictly correspondent, and entirely owing to the state and action of the mind.

So that reason is neither more nor less the agent, in all our tempers and passions, than it is in our most dry and sedate speculations.

It may, and often does happen, that a man may have as great an eagerness and impatience, in

in the solving a mathematical problem, as another hath to obtain any great good, or avoid any great evil.

But may it therefore be said, that it is not reason that solves, or desires to solve, the problem, because the bodily spirits are so active in it?

In a word; if our passions and tempers might not be imputed to our reason, as its own genuine acts and operations, because they have such a concurrence of bodily spirits, neither could arguing, or reasoning, be attributed to our *reason*, as its proper act and operation, because in all argumentation, the bodily spirits are necessarily employed; and the better and closer the reasoning is, the more they are excited and employed.

If it should farther be objected, that reason is only *right reason*, and therefore cannot be said to act or operate, but where, and so far as, right reason acts.

This is as absurd as to say, that *love* signifies only *pure love*, and *hatred* just hatred; and that therefore a man cannot be said to love, or hate, but when, and so far as, his love is pure, and his hatred just.

To draw now some plain consequences from the foregoing account.

First, If reason be, as above represented, the *universal agent* in the natural man; if all the difference among *such* men, either in speculation, or practice, is only such a difference as reason makes, then nothing can be more extravagant, than to affirm any thing concerning the

the degree of perfection, or imperfection of reason, as *common* to man. It is as wild and romantick, as to pretend to state the measure of folly and wisdom, of fear and courage, of pride and humility, of good humour and ill humour, *common* to mankind: For as these states of the mind, are only so many different states of reason; so no uncertainty belongs to them, but what, in the *same degree*, belongs to *reason*.

Secondly, Granting that all matters of religion, must be agreeable to *right, unprejudiced reason*; yet this could be no ground for receiving nothing in religion, but what *human reason* could prove to be necessary; for *human reason*, is no more *right unprejudiced reason*, than a sinner is *sinless*, or a man an *angel*.

Granting again, that a man may go a great way towards rectifying his reason, and laying aside its prejudices; yet no particular man can be a *better judge* of the rectitude of his *own reason*, than he is of the rectitude of his *own self-love*, the sagacity of his *own understanding*, the brightness of his *own parts*, the justness of his *own eloquence*, and the depth of his *own judgment*.

For there is nothing to deceive him in *self-love*, in the opinion of his *own merit, wit, judgment, and eloquence*, but what has the same power to deceive him, in the opinion of his *own reason*. And if, as our author says, *it be the fate of most sects to be fondest of their ugliest brats**, none seem so inevitably exposed to

this *fatality*, as those whose religion is to have no *form*, but such as it receives from their own hearts.

Thirdly, A man that has his religion to chuse, and with this previous privilege, that he need not allow any thing to be matter of religion, but what his own right reason can prove to be so, is in as fair a way to be governed by his *passions*, as he that has his *condition* of life to chuse, with the liberty of taking that which his own right reason directs him to.

Does any one suppose now, that nothing but *right reason* would direct him in the choice of his condition? Or that he would make the better choice, because he proceeded upon this maxim, that nothing could be right, but that which was agreeable to his *own reason*? Or that his tempers, his prejudices, his self-love, his passions, his partiality, would have no influence upon his choice, because he had resigned himself up to his *own right reason*?

For as our choice of a condition of life is not a matter of speculation, but of good and evil; so however it is recommended to our reason, it chiefly excites our passions. And our choice will be just as reasonable, as our tempers and passions are. And he that is made the most positive, of the sufficiency of his own right reason, will be the most likely to be governed by the blindness of his own passions.

Now it is just the same in the choice of a religion, as in the choice of a condition of life: As it is not a matter of speculation, but of *good* and *evil*; so if it is left to be stated and determined

determined by our *own reason*, it rather appeals to our *tempers*, than employs our reason ; and to resign ourselves up to our own reason, to tell us what ought, or ought not to be a matter of religion, is only resigning ourselves up to our tempers, to take what we *like*, and refuse what we *dislike* in religion.

For it is not only natural and easy for him, who believes that nothing can be a part of religion, but what his reason can prove necessary to be so, to take that to be *fully proved*, which is only *mightily liked* ; and all that to be entirely contrary to *reason*, which is only vastly contrary to his *tempers* ; this, I say, is not only natural and easy to happen, but scarce possible to be avoided.

In a word ; When *self-love* is a proper arbitrator betwixt a man and his adversary ; when *revenge* is a just judge of meekness ; when *pride* is a true lover of humility ; when *falsehood* is a teacher of truth ; when *lust* is a fast friend of chastity ; when the *flesh* leads to the spirit ; when *sensuality* delights in self-denial ; when *partiality* is a promoter of equity ; when the *palate* can taste the difference between sin and holiness ; when the *hand* can feel the truth of a proposition ; then may *human reason* be a proper arbitrator between God and man, the sole, final, just judge of all that ought, or ought not to be matter of a *holy, divine and heavenly religion*.

Lastly, If this be the state of reason, as has been fully proved, then to pretend, that our reason is too perfect to be governed by any thing

thing but its own light, is the same extravagance, as to pretend, that our love is *too pure* to be governed by any thing but its own inclinations, our hatred *too just* to be governed by any thing but its own motions. For if all that is base and criminal in love, all that is unjust and wicked in hatred, is strictly and solely to be imputed to our reason; then no perfection can be ascribed to our reason, but such as is to be ascribed to our love and hatred.

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